"The Thirteenth Floor" by FRANK GRUBER

JANUARY

Weird Tales

20¢

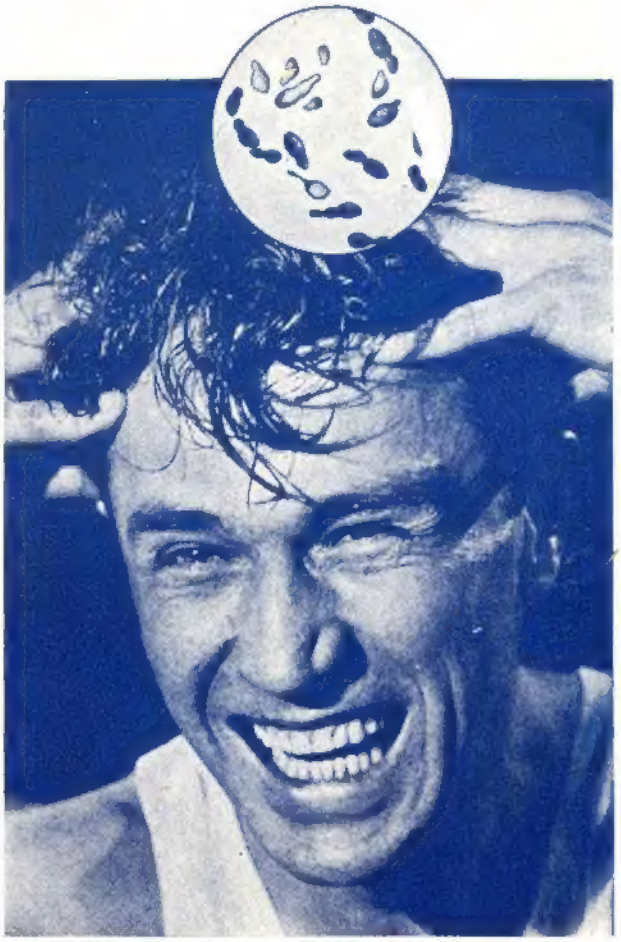
"FOUR FROM JEHLAM"

by

Allison Harding

Listerine likes nothing better than to

FIGHT INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF



THAT should be good news to you if you have any sign of this condition.

That's the kind of a case Listerine Antiseptic really welcomes . . . the infectious type in which germs are active . . . in which inflammation and itching may be present . . . in which scales and flakes are a humiliating problem and relief seems far off. Then Listerine really goes to work, often giving amazing results which test cases clearly show.

Kills Infectious Dandruff Germs

First Listerine gives hair and scalp a cooling and refreshing antiseptic bath. The scalp tingles and glows. Distressing flakes and scales begin to go . . . inflammation and itching are alleviated.

But most important of all, Listerine Antiseptic kills millions of the germs associated with infectious dandruff—including the strange "bottle bacillus," called Pityrosporum Ovale.

This threatening parasite is recognized by outstanding dandruff specialists to be a causative agent of infectious dandruff. As you know, dandruff is the most common diseased scaly condition of the scalp and is often infectious.

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Extensive research showed that when rabbits were inoculated with Pityrosporum Ovale, they soon developed dandruff symptoms like those with which you are familiar. When Listerine was applied daily to the affected areas these symptoms disappeared in 14 days, on the average.

Clinical tests on men and women who used Listerine Antiseptic and massage twice a day revealed even more impressive results. In one series of tests 76% of dandruff sufferers showed either complete disappearance of or marked improvement in the symptoms of dandruff within 30 days.

Confirming such scientific results are enthusiastic letters from users, praising Listerine Antiseptic for dandruff.

Don't Delay . . . Use Listerine Now

If you have any sign of dandruff, start the Listerine treatment at once. Neglect may aggravate the symptoms.

Lambert Pharmacal Co., *St. Louis, Mo.*

THE TREATMENT

MEN: Douse full strength Listerine Antiseptic on the scalp morning and night. **WOMEN:** Part the hair at various places, and apply Listerine Antiseptic right along the part with a medicine dropper, to avoid wetting the hair excessively.

Always follow with vigorous and persistent massage with fingers or a good hair brush. Continue the treatment so long as dandruff is in evidence. And even though you're f rom dandruff, enjoy a Listerine massage once a week to guard against infection. Listerine Antiseptic is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 50 years as a mouth wash and gargle.

The medical treatment that thousands employ!

WERE the great personages of the past victims of a stupendous hoax? Could such eminent men of the ancient world as Socrates, Pericles, and Alexander the Great have been deluded and cast under the spell of witchcraft—or did the oracles whom they consulted actually possess *a mysterious faculty of foresight?* That *the human mind can truly exert an influence over things and conditions* was not a credulous belief of the ancients, but a known and demonstrable fact to them. That there exists a wealth of infinite knowledge just beyond the border of our daily thoughts, which can be aroused and commanded at will, was not a fantasy of these sages of antiquity, but a dependable aid to which they turned in time of need.

It is time you realized that the rites, rituals and practices of the ancients were not superstitions, but subterfuges to conceal the marvelous workings of natural law from those who would have misused them. Telepathy, projection of thought, the materializing of ideas into helpful realities, are no longer thought by intelligent persons to be impossible practices, but instead, *demonstrable sciences*, by which a greater life of happiness may be had.

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Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1949 Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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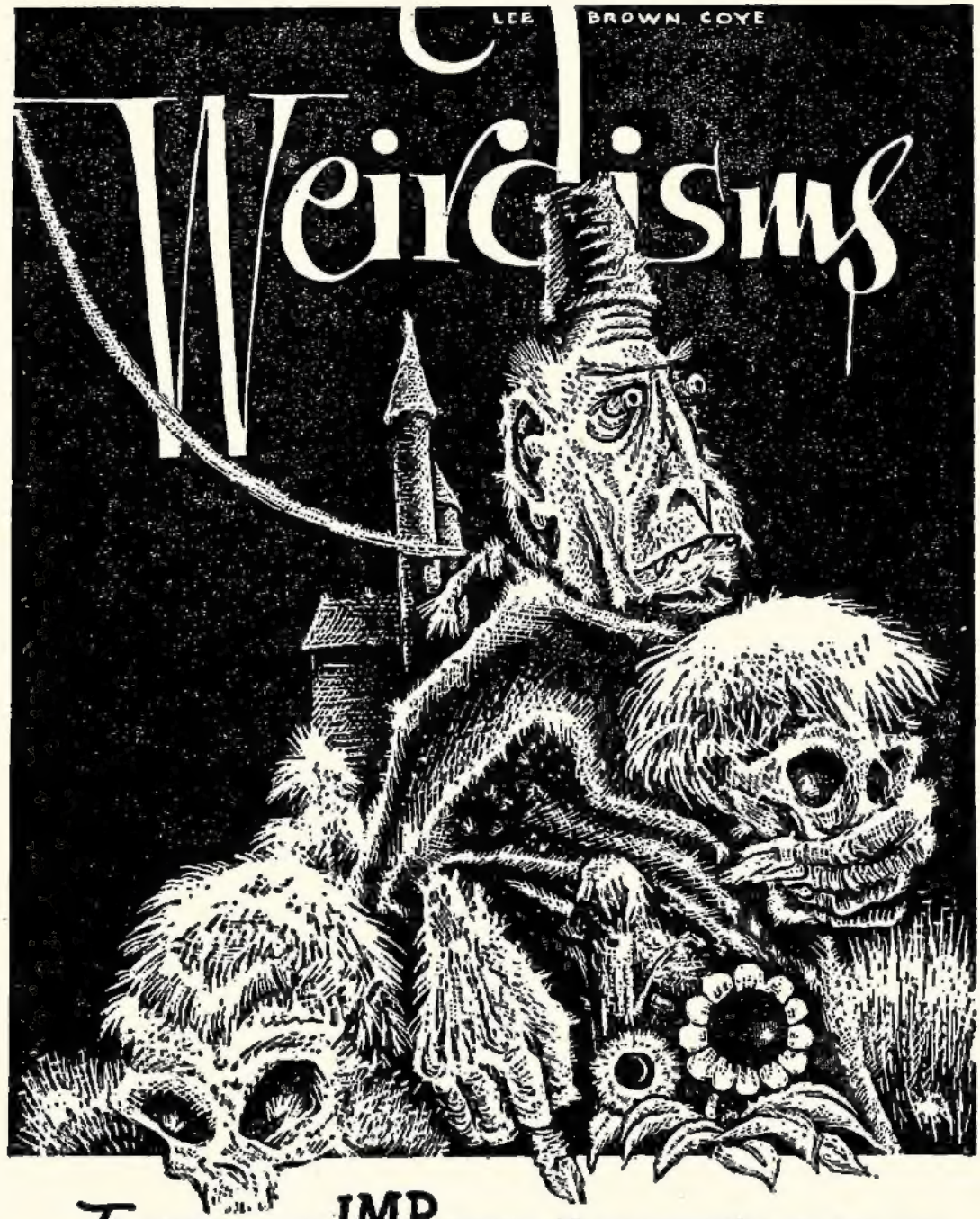
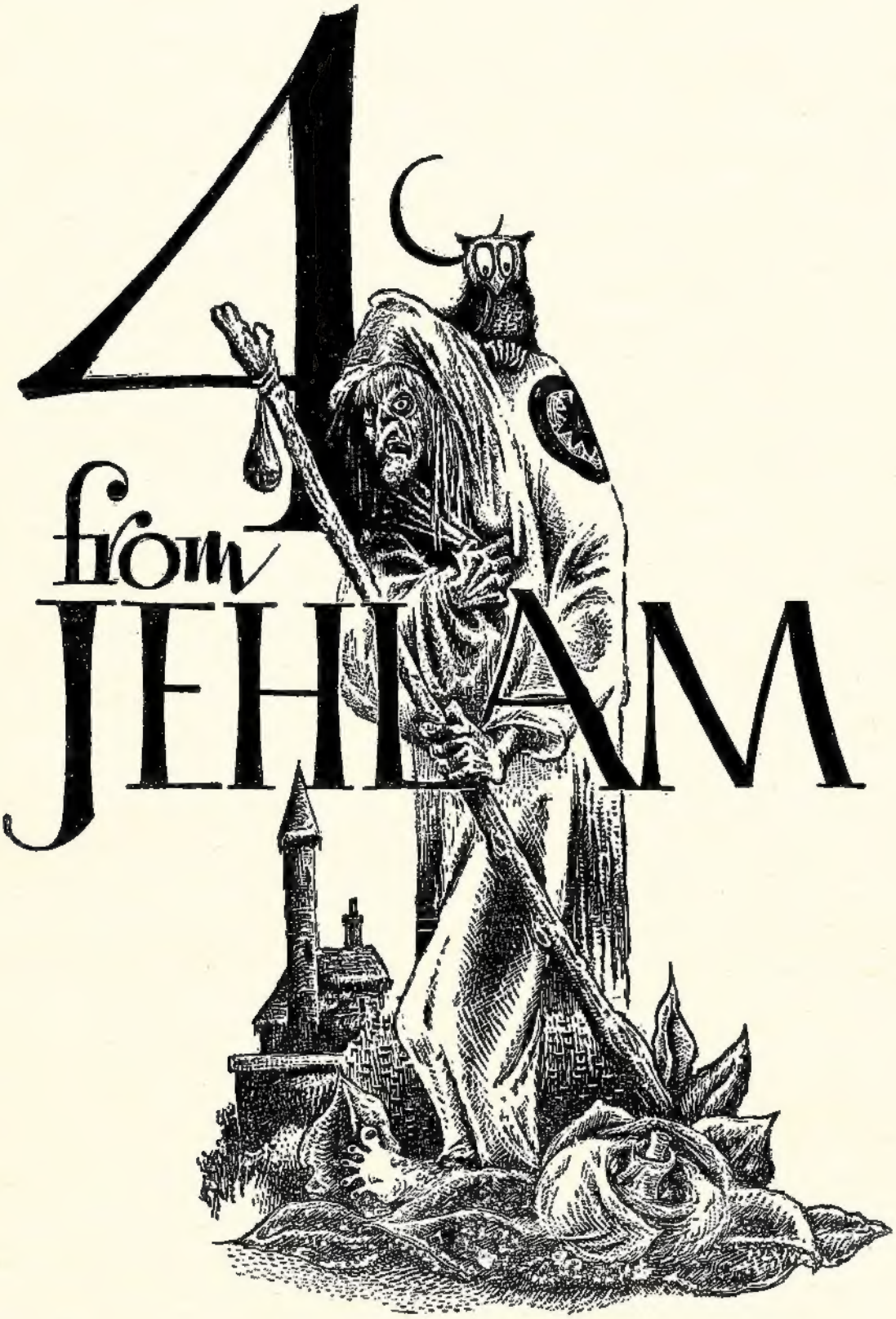
D. McILWRAITH, *Editor* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor*



TO DESCRIBE AN IMP WOULD BE TO DESCRIBE ALL THE REPULSIVE, MEAN & DISREPUTABLE CREATURES IN CREATION. THEY TOOK THE FORM OF ANYTHING THE WHIM OF THE MASTER-MIND DICTATED. THEY WERE SOMETIMES SEEN AS A TINY, UGLY AND DEFORMED OLD MAN OR WOMAN. SOMETIMES AS A DOG OR A CAT OR A PIG. WHEN NOT ON THE PROWL THE IMP LIVED IN A MOLE ON THE WIZARDS PERSON OR IN HIS EAR. NO MATTER HOW EVIL A SCHEME THE MASTER COULD CONCOCT, THE IMP, BEING OF THE MASTERS BEING & MIND, WOULD CARRY IT TO ITS CONCLUSION, AN IMP WAS THE VEHICLE BY WHICH DESTRUCTION AND MISERY WERE WROUGHT UPON THE VICTIMS.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from
JEHLAM

By Allison V. Harding

THE FROWZY hotel caught the slanting rays of the hot sun, filtered the light through dirty windows and captured a last, golden glow from the west in the ice and sparkle of four highballs perched on a mid-room table. The four men seated around the chipped mahogany table had the look of those about to partake of something pleasurable. And yet withal, there was an air of discontent in the room.

Finally Major Hugh Tavener, a military man from his slightly gray close-cropped hair and neat mustache to the high-polished boots, reached for his glass.

"Damn it, Malcolm!" he expostulated to the rugged, raw-boned companion at his side, "I don't know why we hang around this Godforsaken place! And as for your blaming our coming here on my wanting to see Ronnie Hamilton at Jamrud. . . !"

Malcolm Lysander, explorer, shrugged impatiently, revealing a shoulder stiff from the spear of a maddened native he had encountered on some past exploration. "We all wanted to go through Khyber. Certainly Jehlam isn't worse than Bhera."

There was a reply on Major Tavener's lips when the knock came at the door. Malcolm rose and went to the door. Although the others could not speak it, they heard him conversing with someone in Bengali, the Indo-European tongue of India. The portal was flung wide revealing from behind Malcolm's broad shoulders and gruff face a small, turbaned boy standing in the opening.

He accepted some proferred silver, beckoned and then disappeared. Malcolm waited expectantly, and in a moment, there appeared one of the oldest women the three had ever seen. She shuffled into the room, her dark clothes held tightly around her spare frame, eyes deep set, the skin of her face yellow and drawn.

"I say!" somebody murmured. It was the third member of the party, Bertie Phillips, a smallish, sandy-haired fellow. His surface frivolity belied the sensitive seriousness underneath that went with his artistic nature.

The fourth, Edmond Milody, sat quietly twirling a pencil, a habit formed from his years as a Fleet Street journalist.

THE aspect of the ancient woman to the four Englishmen was outre enough even to those who knew something of many of the strange places of the world, including one of the strangest—India.

But what caught their attention the most —for there were many old-beyond-counting hags who wandered through India, mendicants and itinerant wonder-workers or members of the religious order of Islam —was the bird perched on the woman's shoulder, its talons anchored firmly into the material that swathed her arm. It had the soft plummage, the round head and gray coloring characteristic of an owl, but it was smaller than the tawny species known in England.

It was, as one of the four commented afterward, more like an owlet. Its large, unblinking eyes took in the room, even as did those of its mistress. Malcolm made a small motion towards a chair, but the woman shook her head and sank upon the floor in the center with an ease unexpected for one of her years. The owlet took this change of its mistresses' posture with unblinkling solemnity.

Malcolm cleared his throat.

"Now, you blokes, this is why I wanted to stay over a day or so here in this flea bag! This woman. . ." he indicated the

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

To live but to die is the fate of all mankind, but for these four the shadows of doom held a terrifying uncertainty

guest . has been mentioned to me as most remarkable. She has no name as far as I can discover, but is referred to as 'The Gifted One.' All of you know that Yoga is an extreme type of mental discipline, through the application of which some are able to perform near-miracles!"

While he spoke, the old woman's eyes never left his face, but the owlet seemed to scrutinize each of the men in turn.

Malcolm continued: "These dervishes—I believe I am correct in using that term—are presumed by many to have amazing powers. Now, first of all, I want to assure you fellows that I personally have never seen or spoken to 'The Gifted One.' I sent for her, it is true, but she meets us all now for the first time."

He bent his head quizzically and the woman bowed in acknowledgment. Then she began to speak slowly.

"You . . ." she addressed Malcolm are Malcolm Lysander. You have been many places and that is your persuasion. You are an explorer."

She turned to the others: "Bertram Phillips . . ." she pronounced distinctly ". . . are a painter of seascapes." She turned her head. "Major Tavener, you are of the military." And finally, fixing her wise old eyes on the fourth man, "Edmond Milody, you are a journalist!"

Major Tavener snorted and shook his head.

The woman went on: "You four served together in the Dorest Regiment of his Majesty's Own Fusileers, being from 1914 to 1918 under arms."

Tavener protested forcibly, "Connivance! Sheer connivance!"

But Lysander stilled him with a wave of his hand.

"I assure you, my dear Hugh.

THE woman continued. Milody, the writer, listened closely. The timbre of her voice was not particularly pleasing, but what interested him most was that her accent wasn't the usual one expected from the English spoken by Indians. It had more of a Central European flavor. The woman spoke on, and much of what she said was about them.

"But I say!" Bertie Phillips spoke up. "My dear chap, these are details which *you* know," he addressed himself to Lysander.

Malcolm drew himself up to full height. "I give you my word! I have not spoken to this woman before!"

"I side with Phillips!" Major Tavener put in. "Rank chicanery! What do you call these people? Fakirs?"

"I'd go a little easy," Milody spoke. "Some Afridi tribesman under her spell might sink a spear into you, Hugh."

Lysander shrugged. "Well, I thought we might get a kick out of it, this vacation of ours being in its last month. Truthfully, I'd heard a great deal about her. I'm sorry it fell flat."

He reached into his pocket preparatory to broaching the subject of payment to the old woman. She looked up at him.

"There is some doubt?"

Lysander was plainly embarrassed. This *had* fallen flat! The time he'd gotten the stuffed snake to put in Bertie Phillips' bunk

—that had worked out considerably more hilariously. He cleared his throat.

"But I know all about you! From here!" The old woman tapped at her head. "And about what will happen to you. All of you, if you would like to hear."

"Cross her palm with a little more coin of the realm!" Milody murmured from his corner of the room.

"No. No." Lysander had resolved now persuaded by the skepticism of Tavener and Phillips. "We don't want any further telling, Old Woman."

"There is doubt!" the woman said positively. "Doubt about my powers!"

Her eyes roamed the room. They lingered at Milody's waist, at the sheathknife he wore on his belt.

"I would borrow that blade," she requested.

Milody shrugged, got up and handed it to her.

"Foolishness! All foolishness!" the Major grumbled.

"Now please to look."

Almost vehemently, the crone pulled back the swathings over one of her skinny arms.

Without hesitation she plunged the point of the weapon viciously into the unhealthy wrinkled skin midway between the elbow and wrist.

"Good Lord!" Bertie Phillips was on his feet. "She's trying to kill herself!"

"Off her top!" Tavener exploded.

THE long blade of the hunting knife passed completely through her arm and protruded out the other side, and the woman sat looking up at the four now-speechless men and then proceeded before the four pairs of eyes to draw the knife back and forth through the tissues of her old arm, grinning all the while as though she were actually enjoying a delicious sensation.

It was Milody who broke the silence, his voice rising with excitement as he stared down at the gruesome sight.

"Get her out of here! Get her out of here, Lysander! She's leprous!"

The others recoiled at the word. Milody was at the door, flinging it open, calling out, his face contorted with emotion and fury. In answer to the hubbub, first the small, turbanned Indian boy appeared and finally a hotel major domo.

"Get her out of here!" Milody ordered. "Imagine . . ." he turned to Malcolm Lysander, ". . . bringing someone like that in our quarters! She has no 'un-ordinary' powers but she has an unordinary sickness!"

The major domo tried to understand. "What is wrong?"

Behind him two husky native porters appeared ready for anything.

"This woman," Malcolm explained. "She's sick! Leprosy. She should be driven out of town!"

The domo stiffened. He motioned to his porters, babbling to them. One disappeared for a moment and returned with a long pole. The three entered the room, almost on tiptoes. The one with the pole aimed it at the hag still crouched on the floor.

"Get up!" the domo ordered gripping his hands but keeping a safe distance from the black-garbed woman.

One of the porters pointed at the owlet, his face screwed with fear. Lysander turned to his three companions.

"Evil bird, the native is saying. They mean to drive her into the river," he jerked his head in the crone's direction.

"Get up!" the major domo shrilled again, and the pole-bearing native prodded the woman.

SHE rose slowly and stood a silent, tense little figure, the owlet still perched balefully on her shoulder. Her face was dark now with understanding and rage. Her small eyes blinked around the room, and where she looked, the owlet's great orbits also followed.

Milody was explaining to Major Tavener: "I've seen a bit of it before, Hugh. When she rolled up her sleeve, I noticed the nodules and ulcerations. Often too, there's a sort of paralysis or a disturbance of sensation. That was no great mental gift, her being able to plunge the knife in her arm! She has no feeling there any longer, I suspect."

The woman heard and glared at the journalist. But the porter with the pole and his two companions were becoming more insistent. The major domo was jabbering incessantly, his own anger mounting at the

thought that his poor hotel should be so dealed. She would be driven to the river bottom or burned or thrown to tigers! That he promised her!

But still the woman stayed them, ignoring the pole-proddings.

"I came to tell you remarkable things," she spoke, "and I will. Of four tomorrows! You, Bertram Phillips, you love the sea. You know it and paint it. You will drown! The Major Tavener, a military man," her lips curled with the pleasure of saying the thing. "You will be blasted to death! The explorer," she turned to Malcolm Lysander. "You explore dangerous and dark parts of the earth. Beware the venom of a fatal bite! And you, Edmond Milody," she was silent for a moment and her yellow eyes seemed to generate a hell-fire of their own. "You are a writer and will chronicle these things, living to survive your three friends, only at the end to be killed by a tool of your trade.

"And I who have been adjudged unfit for your quarters shall then move into your domicile before you are fairly cold!"

Of the four Englishmen, only Tavener then took a threatening step forward. But it was unnecessary. The chattering porters and the screeching major domo had closed in, not too near but with a vigorous persuasiveness that forced the old woman towards the door and out it.

As she passed from the room, the silent bird upon her shoulder gave vent to a high-pitched scream. It was an eerie sound in the stillness of the late afternoon, and even after the woman disappeared and the noise of the chattering threesome driving her down the dusty road towards the Jehlam River died away, the screeching of the owlet could still be heard. And then that too faded in the distance.

After that experience, the four travelers were not in India much longer. Ending their post-World War I vacations, they returned to England and scattered to their various pursuits.

It was strange, Edmond Milody used to think in those first years after the war, that although each of them, including himself, had been considerably affected by that scene in the Jehlam hotel, there was a marked reluctance on any of their parts to speak openly of the episode to the others.

FROM time to time in the early 1920's they had a get-together as old regimental companions do. At the third of these in 1923, Milody noticed that the jocularity seemed somewhat forced. At a propitious moment, Hugh Tavener took the journalist aside.

"Edmond, you know I'm up in the same neck of the woods as Bertie. I don't think things are right with him."

Milody nodded, took the inevitable brown pencil out of his vest pocket, thoughtfully squeezed it in his fingers as he did when preoccupied.

"You spend so much time bobbing around Fleet Street," the major went on, "you probably haven't heard, but I understand . ." he lowered his voice even more, ". . . that Bertie's income from his painting has dropped down to just about nothing!"

Edmond had noticed the artist's wan expression as they'd hoisted drinks earlier.

"What's the story, Hugh?"

The military man shifted uncomfortably.

"Well, Edmond, as I understand it from a young fellow who knows Bertie through the studio, he won't go near the water anymore!"

There was an uneasy pause.

"I see you remember," Major Tavener went on after a close look at Milody's face. He stiffened and set his own features in hard lines with a conscious effort. "I think it's blasted nonsense, but Bertie's always been kind of flighty. That was his living, though. Painting the water."

"And . ." Edmond Milody took up, nodding his head, ". . to paint seascapes, you've got to go on the sea or near it, and he's afraid of . being drowned! Is that it?"

The major nodded. "That seems to be the story. Do you think we can do anything, old chap? You've always been a good one with the words."

Milody promised he'd try. Later that evening when the reunion broke up, he saw to it that he left the Essex Bar arm in arm with Phillips. They talked of this and that as they progressed towards the tram station where the artist would catch a conveyance to his home.

Finally Milody took the plunge: "How's everything going, Bertie?"

The other started to frame a conventional reply. But then at the look in the journalist's eyes, he almost broke down.

"Terribly, Edmond!" he admitted. "Terribly! I suppose Major Hugh's been talking to you. Well, I . . . I can't seem to help it!"

"It's that fool woman in Jehlam and her drivel?" Milody asked.

Phillips nodded his head. "I know it's ridiculous, old man. It's like a bit of child's fiction. But I keep dreaming of that afternoon in India. Of that old, old witch, the bird on her shoulder—do you remember how that creature screamed at us, Edmond, when the major domo forced her out of the building—oh, I know it's silly, but I have nightmares about it and a terrible fear of the water! She *said* I would drown, Edmond. And you know, I've come to believe it with a sort of fatalism, and yet in spite of that, self-preservation makes it impossible for me to go near the sea or even a lake or river! My work has suffered. In fact there isn't any work anymore! I try painting other things, but water was really my medium."

Milody put a hand on the other's shabby coat sleeve.

"Have you thought of seeing a doctor, Bertie?"

Phillips shook his head. "Wouldn't do any good. Anyway, I'm counting every penny now."

"If it's that . . ." put in the journalist.

"No, Edmond, thanks a lot. I wouldn't think of it. As to the doctors, you know what they'd say to me. That it was ridiculous!"

THE meetings of the four grew less and less numerous. Milody pursued his trade and heard variously as the years passed that Major Tavener had now retired from the army; that Lysander was coming home from an African exploration, and that Phillips was doing very, very poorly.

But it was a distinct shock when he got the telegram summoning him to a south-of-England town. It was about Phillips. Bertie was dying. Milody hurried to the artist's home. He found the painter living in a small, almost-heatless garret, tended by a young protege and an old landlady who brought soups and custards to him out of the kindness of her heart.

Milody was shocked at the artist's appearance. He had wasted to a mere nothing and lay in a semi-stupor, his drawn, ravaged face colored only with fever. The journalist had an immediate conference with the village doctor who, sans remuneration, had been treating the painter.

The physician came at once, thumped Bertie's chest and shook his head from side to side.

"It's his lungs, Mister Milody. He's had this for a long time. I've told him repeatedly over the last few years that this climate was no place for him! I suggested he go to the seashore or some better climate, but he would have none of it! His heart's giving out too, Mister Milody."

Edmond turned back to the sickroom, prepared for the vigil, which was unpleasant but at least not long. Bertram regained consciousness once, recognized his friend and put out a thin, palsied hand.

"Good of you, Edmond," he gasped, his breath rattling horribly.

Those were the only coherent words he uttered during the writer's stay. But many times, while Milody sat by the sick bed nervously, fingering the brown pencil from his vest pocket, Phillips would mumble. The mumblings were not comforting. Milody was philosopher enough to know that all men die, but he believed as firmly that, if possible, they should die with untroubled minds.

Phillips was still obsessed with thoughts of Jehlam and the old black-swathed woman and the curse she'd placed on the four. The journalist, who had seen many men die in the course of his work and lifetime, found Bertie's death not an easy one. The arrival of Tavener in those last hours was also trying.

The major was not himself. He was visibly upset. And Milody thought at first, Hugh seemed to have a perverse compulsion to question the town doctor about the exact cause of death.

The journalist sat abjectly in the corner looking out the small garret window. It was all over now. Only a part of his mind registered Tavener's voice cross-examining the physician. Then his thoughts came back

to the room. He heard and digested what was being said.

"In a manner of speaking, yes, Major Tavener," the little doctor's voice proclaimed.

"You see, in a condition like your friend's, his weakened lungs and his heart failing, the sacs do fill up with water."

"You hear that, Edmond!" Tavener turned towards the journalist almost triumphantly with a fierce grin on his face. "Water in his lungs! He drowned, Edmond! Just as *she* said he would!"

WITH a clearness of the trained reporter, Milody remembered these scenes with a remarkable clarity. He would consider them in his own mind's eye and try to interpret them different ways. Every memory was as pure as though the actions which had inspired it had occurred only a few days ago. Actually, by the time the journalist moved into a rented room in a boarding-house on the outskirts of London, it was nearly two decades since the affair at Jehlam, and yet he could visualize the face of the hateful old woman as vividly as he could see the prosaic features of his unimaginative landlord, Mr. Philpotts.

Even in the most frightening sequence of events, there are some reassuring aspects. Milody thought again and again of how old the woman had been those years ago. She had looked well along in her eighties as he remembered her in the hotel. She could have been even older. Even if she'd been ten or fifteen years younger, and that was impossible, then he'd estimated she would surely be dead these many years later.

Milody grew tired of Major Tavener's actions after Bertie Phillips' death. Tavener kept "dropping in" to talk of the unpleasant demise of the artist.

"Lungs filled up with water, Edmond! You could hear the slopping and gurgling when he breathed! That's what the medico said too. And *she* said it, Milody, me lad! That he would drown!"

The journalist thought to himself with some distaste for his old friend, why, he actually *enjoyed* talking about this thing. But underneath the grim bravado of the ex-soldier, Edmond saw strain and worry eating at the man.

One night after some beers and a game of darts together, Tavener brought it up.

"Ever think about that woman from Jehlam, Edmond?"

The writer admitted that he did occasionally.

"I was the next! After Bertie, she mentioned me! Said I'd be blown up! Remember? I've often wondered. . . ." The more-than-enough beers made Hugh even more loquacious than usual, " . . . if t'was that she-devil that made me resign my commission in the Fusileers! No man likes to think of himself as a coward, and everybody in the military knows that sooner or later he may be blasted to hell. But I suppose I did leave the service to show that that wicked woman was wrong. Army or navy's the place to get blown up; isn't it, Milody?" He laughed at his own words, and soon the two separated.

Edmond was somewhat out of patience for he'd forgotten to broach a subject that was much on his mind. Milody realized Hugh knew little else but soldiering. Now he was out. His painfully small allowance was inadequate for even many of the necessities of life. Only a few weeks ago he had written his journalist friend that he'd moved to humble quarters in Liverpool. Milody was familiar with the district. It was the poorest of the poor. He suffered to think of his friend there, and he'd thought that on this meeting, he would say:

"Look, Hugh, old fellow. People still seem to be buying my trash, and I know you've run into a little tough luck. Just until you get the fires burning again, why not let me loan you. . . ."

But no, the Major wouldn't have liked it. His character was as stiff-backed and unyielding as his physique, as his formal gray military mustache. But still, Milody came to wish more and more that he'd at least made the gesture that night. For it was the last time he saw Hugh Tavener alive.

IT WAS the papers this time that broke the news with their impersonal black-and-white logic. The headline blazoned: "Blast in Liverpool Flat Kills Ex-Entertainment Queen, Neighbor." The papers, of course, featured the fact that Lily Evans, former toast of English music halls,

had "taken her last bow." She'd been unemployed now for many years, but not so many that those who knew her as a middle-aged, worn-out spinster, failed to remember her triumphs on the stage in another decade.

There was just a small paragraph at the end that mentioned that the force of the explosion from the turned-on gas had blown in the flimsy partition of the next room, also killing its occupant, a "Major Hugh Tavener, formerly of the Dorset Regiment, His Majesty's Own Fusileers."

The journalist made connection with the earliest available train, got to the demolished flat the next day. He had it in his mind to salvage what he could of Tavener's few pitiful remaining possessions for sentiment.

THIS distasteful task done with Milody turned away from the wrecked tenement for the last time to traverse the poverty-stricken byways of Liverpool to the railroad station, he ran squarely into Malcolm Lysander. The other greeted him excitedly, out of breath for he had been running from the nearest depot. He waved a paper under Milody's nose.

"Edmond, isn't it terrible! You know, the first thing I did when I landed at Southampton was to buy some good old English papers and then I see this!" He indicated with his finger the sliver suicide story.

Lysander stared over the journalist's shoulder at the demolished flats. Edmond quietly turned the other around and walked him away from the scene.

"It's been quite a while, Malcolm. I'm glad to see you."

"And I you, Edmond," Lysander replied. "But Hugh! And not so long after poor old Bertie!"

The journalist apportioned Tavener's few belongings between himself and Lysander, gave the explorer his London address and exchanged whatever other news he could think of with the man.

As they parted at the Liverpool station, their handshake was firm and almost fervent.

Lysander said, "We must take care of ourselves, Edmond. We're all that's left, aren't we?"

And then the high-pitched scream of the London train ended that long moment wherein each looked at the other's face and saw fear there.

Milody had had a hard two days. He tried to rest in the juggling compartment on the way back to London, but total sleep would not come. In his half-awake state, the shriek of the train whistle would somehow become the sound of the old woman's owlet screaming in Jehlam long years ago. The triumphant screaming and shrieking was becoming deafening when Edmond became fully awake and realized the train was hooting for the Essex stop.

The writer got off the express and trudged wearily to his quarters. He lay down, and after many hours during which evening passed into night and the traffic on the cobblestone back street outside his boarding house dwindled and ceased completely, he fell into fitful slumber.

His dreams were hideous, as hideous as the old witch woman of Jehlam, and filled with the shriekings of the owlet sounding like the Liverpool train coming back from his grim duty. He tossed and turned and finally woke up in the wee hours, feverish from the dream and his lack of restful sleep.

THE next day as he went back to work, Milody reassured himself that events of the last few days were hardly conducive to a good night's rest. He had good control of his nerves. He was not used to bad dreams. He told himself he did not expect to get them again. But the nightmares would come again. And again. So much so that he grew tired of staring up at the ceiling with the small pattern of light on it from the lamp across the cobblestone street that ran 'neath his window. Yet the monotonous and gloomy appearance of his room by lamplight was preferable to the dreams.

Milody was relieved, therefore, when he received the message. A small grimy boy brought it from the wireless office. It said simply: "Will you come as soon as possible. Lysander."

Milody's journalistic efforts had not been without success in the last few months. He was correspondent for several reputable weeklies, did a column for the "News," and there was even some possibility that a

small volume of his essays might be brought out by an independent and enthusiastic publisher.

There was this matter of the nightly ordeals, though. The journalist was not one to look with too-great kindness upon psychiatry and psychiatrists. For he felt he applied the science himself in his everyday life, and surely no hocuspocus by some pseudo-scientist could open up doors of new insight into his trouble.

As Milody suffered, he had analyzed. Undoubtedly, the aged, witchlike woman years ago in northern India had remained a strong and distasteful memory with the four of them. But there was, of course, no logical reason, in fact it was insanity, to presume that there could be any connection between recent unfortunate events and that long-ago episode in Jehlam. Yes, Milody had the feeling that he was getting the best of his nervousness, but even so, a change up north would be nice.

He wired an acceptance to Lysander's invitation on his way to the publishers. By the end of the week, his affairs were sufficiently in order to allow him to leave London. The day of Milody's departure, it was such a pleasant morning that he allowed time for a rather circuitous route to the Middlesex Station by way of Alexandra Park and Finchley Common. A brilliant April sun can do gentle things even to the stern environs of London. Edmond arrived at the station in better spirits than he'd enjoyed in months.

As the train took him north, he tapped the point of his brown pencil abstractly against the pane and watched the English countryside flow by. The journalist changed trains at Leicester and continued on in a northerly direction through Nottingham and York. From the latter place, the engine shook itself of several cars; the train became smaller and its passengers few.

Perhaps the traditional beauty of the country was here too, but Milody found the scenery less green, less pleasing than the verdant rolling splendor they'd come through. The train wound its way tortuously to Kirkby Moorside, a village marked by a small stone station and a few scattered buildings on either side of the right of way. The express stopped to drop a bundle of papers and mail on the platform, and the coach cars, now shrunk to two, disgorged a passenger or so and the train chugged on.

At Levisham Milody was joined by an old codger who pointed out, as the train rounded a bend, the brooding Cleveland hills lying like purple shadows against the near horizon. The single track cut a part of the North York moors in half—the hills to the left as they went north and brown-gray moors to the right stretching, the oldster at his elbow explained, almost to the North Sea from whence fog and "that salty smell" came rolling if the wind were right.

Occasionally, under favorable conditions, the musty native averred, a young pair of ears could hear the horn hooting at Hundle Point, and that was about ten miles away on the coast.

The track and train curved inward abruptly then as though the proximity of the spring-cold North Sea was distasteful. The moors slid behind, and here and there some courageous underbrush came into view. The engine slowed, whistled and then hissed to a stop.

They had come upon Wilby so suddenly that the journalist had barely time to gather his gear and leap from the train before it began to move again as though the delapidated red-board shack that passed as a station were beneath its stopping dignity. The last car slid by, and Milody saw his traveling companion peering intently back at him.

THERE was no good reason, the journalist thought, why anyone ever should get off a train at this spot. The shacklike station presented a door. It squeaked on rusty hinges as he went in. A rude bench ran down one side of the single room. A dismantled potbellied stove stood against one corner. The walls were bare except for a last year's timetable thumbtacked in place and an occasional carved initial in the wood here and there. Under the timetable was a tarnished brass set in, "Northern R. R." Under it the almost illegible slogan, "See London and Liverpool via the Northern."

Milody gave up his inspection of the station inside as a fruitless job. Outside he noticed with quickening interest that the light was beginning to fade.

"A beastly place to spend the night," he censured himself, looking at the ugly land across the tracks with its stunted undergrowth suggestive of the nearby moors.

Back of the Wilby station a deeply rutted brown-dirt road took a semi-circle, calculated to deposit prospective Northern R. R. passengers beside a crumbling wooden platform. Then it curled away and disappeared in the distance. In that distance Milody could see what looked like a farmhouse. There was nothing here, he reasoned. Nothing for it but to use Shanks' Mare.

Taking his baggage, he stepped off briskly and made short time of it down the road. It was, as he had observed from trackside, a farmhouse. Some chickens scratched in the front yard and there was a cow around back and a large barn a hundred yards away. He came close to the front door and helloed. On his second try the door opened, and a thickset elderly man came out blinking as though the fading light were too much for his eyes—or he'd just awakened.

"Eh?"

"Hello," greeted the author. "I'm a traveler. I'm trying to get some sort of conveyance to take me out to a Malcolm Lysander's place."

The farmer, for so his dress evidenced him to be, shook his head with alacrity and rubbed big-knuckled hands at his eyes.

"Guess you're the gentleman Mister Lysander was expecting. Last time I saw him, said you were coming in on the afternoon train today and I was to bring you out to his place. But with all the work around my farm here—" he waved a big brown arm, "—I forgot."

Milody quickly assured the man that that part was all right.

"You can take me out then, can you?"

"Sure," said the farmer, "Soon as I hitch up the buggy."

That job was accomplished in due time, and the two were joggling along the lane that led northward.

"Don't you have autos around here?" the journalist queried.

"Some do," the farmer whose name proved to be Orpet nodded his head towards the white-shouldered horse that was pulling them. "This is the best for around here, though. Good horseflesh doesn't go bad on you. Doctor Simms has a car, though, and some of the others."

"You'll all have them," Milody predicted. "You'll all be having autos. Why, probably in a few more years. By 1940 I'll predict."

"Never!" insisted Orpet. "I'll stick to my horse."

The conversation died until Edmond, after some moments, asked: "How far is it?"

"Mister Lysander is a good bit out."

The journalist shook his shoulders somewhat distastefully.

"You're a South gentleman?"

"I've lived around London a lot of my life, yes."

"Friend of Mister Lysander's?"

"Yes."

"Well, it seems as how he can't have things too lonely. Used to come down around the station and our place a lot. Bought eggs from my wife. And I sold him milk, too. Now we hardly ever see him. Oh, except a few days ago when he told me you were coming and asked me to drive you out to his place. And then, sir, he no sooner gave me the message just like that quick but he drove off—he's got a 'cycle, you know—like all the demons of hell were after him! Didn't even come in and have some crumpets with me and my missus. Acted to me like he was frightened of something!

"And to look at him—" Orpet shook his head, "—you wouldn't think anything in the world could scare that one!"

They topped a rise, and Orpet gestured with the buggy whip. "There she is. That's Mister Lysander's."

THE house was set by itself in a valley beneath them. The wild beauty should have pleased him, but Milody found that the desolation was depressing. The wagon picked up speed on the downgrade, and the horse fairly galloped to the white-painted gate that fronted on the lane. Milody thanked Orpet and reached into his pocket.

"No, sir," the farmer shook his head, "I'm taken care of."

He held his horse in tight rein as Milody got out of the wagon. The animal stamped

and snorted and was off before the journalist could wave a final thank-you.

Neatly laid flagstones marked the way from the gate to the front door of Lysander's home. To Milody's un-architectural eye it was a pleasing enough domicile. The grounds might have been kept up a bit better, but that was not for him to say or think. He thumped the brass knocker, and he could hear the reverberations through the house. He looked back as he waited for an answer to his summons. He could see Orpet driving the wagon at a great rate down the country lane, a cloud of brown dust helping with the gloom of fading day to finally obscure buggy and man in the distance.

Then he heard a step inside the door. The portal was thrown open and he stared into Lysander's face. And into the muzzle of a heavy hunting rifle! Automatically Edmond took a step backward, but as quickly, the explorer lowered the firearm. The stern lines of his face eased and he extended his right hand.

"Milody, my friend! I hope I didn't frighten you!"

"Hello, Malcolm." The writer stepped inside and took the proferred hand. "I never thought I'd find myself at the muzzle end of a gun held by the famous explorer, Malcolm Lysander!"

His big-boned friend shrugged. He stood his rifle in the corner of the hall.

"Come! Let me take your things."

The house was smallish inside. A stairway led to the upper floor consisting of Lysander's room, a guest chamber, bath, and the big hall.

Later in the downstairs study Milody watched his friend closely. The explorer had aged. Aged years in a few months. His big frame was no longer robust, but gaunt. He toyed with his drink and sipped it slowly as though without taste. Finally Lysander anticipated the question in the journalist's mind.

"I suppose, Edmond, you are wondering about my rather aggressive greeting. Hardly expected to come face to face with an armed man, eh?"

The slow smile was gone almost as it came to the explorer's brooding face. Lysander started to speak, and then it was as though he interrupted himself. He cocked his head on one side.

"I say, do you hear anything, Milody? No? I have a little terrier. A little brown-and-white chap. Answers to the name of Brownie. Only companion I've got around here, you know. Pretty important to a man. When I first came down to this godforsaken place, I kept him pretty close to me, usually in the house. But you can't do that to a dog. I let him out in the morning, and often he's gone all day.

"Sometimes I'd go with him. You know, Edmond, in time I think I could have made a sort of hunter out of him. He was really fine for flushing up small game. That was before I heard the news. Since then Brownie's gone out alone. I guess he likes his freedom. We all do. But I'd hate to lose the little fellow. He's the only thing I've got to talk to until you came and since I don't go into Wilby the way I used to. Dogs get caught sometimes. I'm always glad to have him come home because if he did get into any trouble out there, I couldn't go out and help him. Did you think you heard a bark outside? No? Well . . . say, I am rambling, Edmond! I apologize."

Malcolm finished the rest of his drink with a resolute gulp and sat silent for a moment, revolving the empty glass and surveying his guest.

"You're looking well, Edmond," he spoke after a moment.

Milody nodded. "Thank you."

The two men were old friends for too long for a sincere compliment to be returned by an insincere one.

"No," Lysander went on, "I'm sure you can't say the same for me. Peace of mind is a wonderful thing, Edmond; the lack of it is very terrible."

"What's eating at you, Malcolm?" Milody had a try at being casual, but despite himself, a knot of tension tightened in him, waiting for the other to go on.

"I don't know exactly. Or perhaps I do and don't want to admit it to myself. But ever since Bertie and dear old Major Hugh, ever since they died, I haven't been the same! As you get older, Edmond, and lose friends, you know as well as I do it's a shock. It's sadness that a man takes around inside himself but you carry on. But with us

four, there's been something different, Edmond. We've been bound together by long ties of friendship—and by something else!" The explorer's lips curled back in a bitter smile. "By something else! I think you know what it is!"

Milody knew. Words were his business, his tools. He searched for some to use now to help and comfort Lysander, to comfort himself. He plucked out the brown pencil from his breast pocket, rolled it in his fingers absently.

And then distinctly from outside, he heard the bark. Lysander was up on his feet looking towards the door.

"You open it, Edmond. You won't mind, will you, there's a good chap! I'm sure that's Brownie!"

"Certainly."

THE journalist went to the hall. He opened the door. It was dark outside, but behind him, Malcolm whistled. There was the patting of feet on flagstones and a small terrier came running in. It was only after he closed the door and turned that Milody saw Lysander putting down the rifle which he must have again picked up.

Malcolm went to the kitchen and prepared a meal for the animal from the meaty remains of their own repast earlier that evening.

"I take good care of him, Edmond," the big man said, placing the platter on the floor and then clucking disapprovingly as the dog sniffed at it and lost interest. "I think sometimes animals are fussier about their food than people. This little fellow's getting sick of venison. I guess he wants a change."

"Well, we could have had more for our own supper," the journalist joked. "Here, pup! What's your name? Brownie? You eat up that good food we've fixed for you!"

The dog was lying beside its full feed bowl, disinterested. Milody reached out a hand to pet the animal and as quickly withdrew it as the dog snapped at him.

"Here, here, Brownie!" Lysander colored up, annoyed. "That's no way to act! He doesn't see many strangers," he apologized, "but I won't have him acting that way."

He put a heavy hand on the terrier's collar and pulled him to his feet, unmindful of the small, sharp teeth that raked his wrist.

"Get temperamental on us, will you, young feller!" He gave the angry dog a stern spanking and took away the food bowl. "Go over into your corner and sleep," Lysander ordered, and the dog slunk to matting laid in the corner of the kitchen and lay down on it.

The two men repaired to the study and sat talking till late, for there were many things to discuss. Old adventures and friends, and before they knew it, it was well past midnight and they went yawning to their respective rooms, Milody noticing, however, that Lysander took his rifle upstairs with him. With goodnights said, the journalist shut his door and was soon in bed.

The night air was good coming through his open window after the soot and suffocation of London. There was the smell of country and greenness and perhaps a faintly discernible smell of ocean, which as his quaint traveling companion on the train had said, "came when the wind was right from the North Sea."

As Milody lay back in his bed aware of the blackness and the soundlessness of the night compared to the all-hours' light and noise of the London environs, he found it hard to stay awake even long enough to mull over his impressions of that evening. It was, of course, the fear about Lysander. And what a strange vessel the raw-boned, gruff explorer was for such an emotion, but it was there. Edmond fell off to sleep fairly in the midst of his thoughts.

HE WOKE to a blasting crescendo of sound. He thought at first it was some explosive quality of his dream, until, wide awake and staring in the darkness, he heard another sharp explosion. He was out of bed, his bare feet stumbling for slippers even as his mind identified and cataloged the sounds as rifle fire. He had a lamp by his bed and took it into the hall. He made his way immediately to Lysander's room.

The abruptness of his waking-up, the shock of noise, and the eerie blackness of the house lent themselves to Milody's mood. He expected anything as he threw open his friend's door. What he found

was the explorer standing by his window, smoking rifle in one hand and a large electric torch in the other. For an instant, the tableau was suggestive of old days in the Fusileers. Lysander was standing off marauders, and near him would be Milody and Bertie Phillips and Major Tavener. The four had never known defeat, but a lot of adventure.

But of course Tavener and Phillips weren't here. With that thought the spell was broken.

"For God's sake, Malcolm, what *are* you doing! What's wrong!"

The other turned away from the window abruptly. "Take this light, Edmond. There's a good fellow. Look down this trellis that ends just under my window. Follow it down to the ground and tell me if you see anything."

Milody did as he was ordered. The trellis was one of those frail wooden ladders commonly seen in country houses of the type.

Up it twined tentacles of ivy. At the lowest level of his inspection, the writer saw something draped over the last rung.

"I don't see anything, Lysander."

"Nothing? Nothing at all on that trellis that shouldn't be there?"

"Well, there's something like a small piece of rope at the bottom."

"That's it!" the explorer fairly hissed, took the flashlight almost roughly from his friend and peered out of window again. The rifle was still clenched in the other hand. "That isn't a rope, Milody. It's a . . . snake!"

The journalist took hold of his friend by the shoulders.

"Malcolm, you'll be tumbling out that window next. Stop talking foolishly. I don't believe it's a snake. It looks like a length of rope. And anyway, everybody knows there aren't dangerous snakes in this part of England, so what of it?"

"What of it," said Lysander, almost to himself with the same bitter smile.

"Get ahold of yourself, old man!" Milody snapped, although the sudden significance of the other's words crept like icicles into his mind. He shook away his own mounting uneasiness. "Give me that flashlight again. There's only one way to settle this!" He took the lamp and turned for the stairs.

"Milody! Milody, don't go outside! It may not be safe!"

"Nonsense What do you think there's here to harm us?"

But his own resoluteness ebbed as he opened the front door and started walking cautiously to make a circle of the house. The dark night pushed around him on all sides, enfeebling the rays of the flashlight. A fog had come in from the sea, sliding stealthily across the moors and into the valley. The cold feeling had spread down the nape of his neck into his spine.

The journalist straightened his shoulders angrily. What was there to be afraid of here in the peaceful English countryside? This kind of fear was in men's minds and he thought of the terrified figure of Lysander upstairs with his hunting rifle. A veteran, who a thousand times over had faced wild beasts and wild men alike without a qualm.

Edmond turned the corner of the house and was in the black. The end of the trellis showed in the outer rim of his light.

"Milody!" Lysander's voice sounded strained coming from the upstairs window. "Milody, for God's sake, be careful!"

The journalist slowed his peace. He flashed the light this way and that.

"When you spot him, if he's not dead, stand clear! I'll fire another shot into the damned reptile!" Lysander's voice sounded strange.

THE flashlight beam covered every inch and then settled triumphantly on the lower ring of the ivy-covered trellis 'neath the explorer's window. Edmond stepped forward quickly. He plucked the ropelike length up. It was that and no more. A harmless length of rope.

"What did I tell you, Malcolm? It's the funniest-looking snake you ever saw!"

He made fast time retracing his steps around the house and back inside, shutting the door firmly behind him. When he got upstairs with his prize, the length of manila, he realized it would be useless to josh Lysander about it. The explorer was seated in a chair disconsolately, his head in his hands, his great frame shaking with emotion like a small child. Edmond seated himself by

his friend's side, and for a while neither spoke.

Finally Lysander got a grip on himself.

"You will think me very strange, Edmond, and not just a little cowardly, I suppose."

"Not you, old friend," Milody soothed.

The other shrugged. "Nevertheless, it seems true. But so help me, Edmond, it's the waiting, the suspense." He crossed to a copy of the Leicester "Illustrated" on his bedtable. In it was a cut-out clipping. He handed it woodenly to the journalist.

It concerned, Milody read, the unfortunate occurrence to the Lafabre Circus traveling through England from the Continent. Some miles outside of Scarborough, the axle of one of the wagons had broken. Several cages of precious animals had been damaged allowing them to escape. Marmosets and monkeys had been finally rounded up, but it seems there had been a reptile crate containing three poisonous snakes. Circus attendants and the authorities from Scarborough to the North York moors were continuing the search, but in the meantime, residents of the entire area were warned to be most careful.

Milody handed the clipping back.

"They haven't been recaptured," Lysander added, "because I have an arrangement with Orpet. You see, since I heard about this I never go out if I can help it. Orpet's to come and tell me if the reptiles have been recaptured. I dream of them, Edmond, if I get to sleep. That's what it is. Snakes. Snakes! Tonight I could have sworn I heard a sound on that trellis, and when I looked out , well, that piece of rope seemed almost to be moving, and it looked to be. . . ."

Milody sat speechless. Here was a man who had hunted some of the most treacherous areas of Africa, who knew the four corners of the world and who had faced most of their worst dangers. Lysander looked up squarely into his friend's eyes and read the thoughts there.

"It's the waiting," he added slowly. "It's a long way and a long wait, Edmond."

"A long way?"

"From Jehlam," Lysander replied simply, the word out between them. The word Milody hated now above all others.

"It's not a decent, clean way for a man like me to go, Milody," the explorer picked up momentum now. "I mean . snakes. Oh, I've run into the damn slimy blighters all over the world. But to know that somehow, some force beyond our ken is directing them towards me!"

"You really believe that, Lysander?"

"Yes. What else? What was it she said, Edmond? I was an explorer, so I would suffer a fatal bite. Isn't it more than a coincidence about that circus and the poisonous reptiles? I can see that old witch woman as though it were yesterday and the hotel in Jehlam from which we had her driven!"

That ancient, ancient black-garbed crone with the owlet on her shoulder. How often had the four of them thought of her since that day so long ago in India? By what strange grace had she won this degree of attention from the four men? For no lovers could have paid a finer tribute to their beloved than they four had paid to the witch woman of Jehlam. For was she not still with them after all these years, her face and form and fearful graces and her macabre owlet? And the ultimate tryst with doom she'd predicted for them all?

THE two went to their separate beds soon afterward, but Edmond found sleep elusive for the rest of the night. He passed the hours till daybreak resolving that he would have a stiff talk with Lysander. It was natural after the untimely deaths of their two friends that one should give more than a fleeting thought to the coincidences between that ancient curse and the realities of life. But accepting all that, somewhere a man had to draw the line or go mad.

Milody was deeply worried for his friend. The explorer was not himself. Probably this enforced exile in the lonely countryside explained some of Malcolm's problem. He would, if he could, the writer determined, get his friend to come and visit him in the city, and with that decision reached, Milody turned on his side and stole an hour or so of sleep as the gray light came faintly up out of the east, lifting the harsh black hand of night from the moors and the valley.

Edmond's resolution was harder to fulfill than he had suspected even in the darkest hours of the previous night. Milody

waited no later than breakfast the next morning to deliver his invitation.

"Come on, old chap. It'll do you good. Close up this place, pack what you'll need. We'll leave Brownie with somebody in Wilby and you come into London with me. It would do you ever so much good to go to a music hall or pub. You need people around you, Lysander. Not just an old lonely house and the desolate countryside. Oh, I think it's beautiful here," he hurried lest his host take offense. "But loneliness is definitely *not* what you need right now."

"It's no go, Edmond," the other replied. "I guess I've gone too far down the road."

"Nonsense, man!"

It went on that way for several days, and finally, for several weeks, long past the length of time Milody had expected to spend in the north of England. Their only contact with the outside world was regular visits from Orpet who, generously reimbursed by the explorer, would bring foodstuffs, papers, and whatever post might have collected from the last trip. Lysander's first words to the farmer were always the same, and although he spoke them with a certain diffidence as though not wanting an outsider to see the fear that prompted them, the question always came out:

"Orpet, did they capture those blasted serpents yet?"

"No, not exactly, although there is a piece in the paper that a woman up Moorside away thought she saw one of them." Orpet shrugged distastefully: "Slimy things! I wish they would catch them."

Despite his coaxing, it became apparent to the journalist that Lysander was not prepared to leave his Wilby house; was, in fact, frightened to leave it. The necessary steps were more than the man, in his highly nervous state, could bear. There would be at the very least the walk out to the shed to get his motorbike, or out to the road to climb onto the Orpet carriage. Snakes sometimes hid in sheds or in carriages. No, Lysander felt safer here.

Finally reconciled to the man's stubbornness, Milody found he had to take his leave. He did extract before he left, however, a half-promise from Lysander that the explorer would get Orpet to send out the local doctor, the physician, Simms. Edmond was uncomfortable about leaving his friend, but the press of business and Lysander's growing impatience with any suggestions calculated to help the situation were decisive.

During the middle of his fourth week at Wilby, Edmond Milody departed, taking the return trip back into town with Orpet, who had first delivered his usual errands of foodstuffs and papers and the laconic reply to the explorer's inevitable question:

"No, Mister Lysander, doesn't look like they'd ever catch up with those snakes."

EDMOND would remember for a long time the scene as he took his leave. Lysander gripped his hand with vice-like strength. The man's stern-lined face was sad, and there was in his eyes a remembrance of the better times that all of them had had together. There was nothing to say. Milody knew any more urging would merely make for a discordant note. He was glad that Brownie, in the last week or so, had experienced something of a change of heart about roaming off for the entire day. The dog seemed more content to lie around the house with Lysander. The animal actually was all he had, and fussing with the canine's diet was at least a source of some, however trival, outside interest.

And now there had been just this—the shake of the hand. The men looking into each other's eyes. Lysander finally said, "Goodbye, Edmond, and thank you for coming."

The writer bobbed his head, paid the usual compliments on the "pleasure" of his stay. It was difficult anyway, with Orpet standing nearby impatient to be off back to town.

"I'll go down fighting!" Malcolm averred with a grim shake of his head.

But Edmond, as he walked quickly out to the wagon, wondered how much good the dog and the gun and Lysander's kind of fighting would do against the things he feared. On the trip back to Wilby Station, the author took pains to plant in Orpet's mind the importance that the farmer get Dr. Simms out to Lysander's house sometime. He cemented his demand with a large tip. The wagon left him at the station and bumped away on the rude brown lane that went towards the Orpet farm.

There was a chill loneliness in this York moor country that Milody did not like. Even in the daylight, standing with his gear beside him on the broken-down platform, he was conscious of it and glad when the plume of smoke in the distance enlarged into a locomotive, it's tender and his train.

The trip down the length of England did not please him as much as going up. He had Lysander very much on his mind. The poor fellow! It was a case that should be solved, and yet was quite unsolvable. Still, the explorer should be safe there. Why he had a veritable armory of firearms in that building. If the ridiculously far-fetched possibility of a snake appearing around the house should materialize, no one would be more competent to deal with the reptile than Malcolm. But about the other part of Lysander's trouble, the real part, Milody did not know. He resented a bit the re-living of that old episode in Jehlam, as it came to him each time one of the three, Bertie, Major Hugh, or Malcolm had brought that adventure up. He resented having it brought up, but at the same time he appreciated that he alone of the four was balanced enough to see that grisly experience in its proper light. For it had no more future or ominousness than a bad dream.

Back in Middlesex again, Milody settled down to his writing work with new vigor. In a week or two, he'd dispatched a lengthy letter to Lysander, and not so long after that, received a rather gruff and taciturn reply. Yes, Malcolm was fine. The explorer confined that he wished he could say the same for Brownie. He wondered if the animal needed a mate.

It was in his next card that Lysander scrawled a note about Brownie's death. For some reason, a sixth sense perhaps, Milody got in touch, not with Lysander this time but directly with Orpet. He reminded the farmer of their last discussion about their mutual friend, the explorer, and he suggested as strongly as he could without making it an order, that Orpet get Dr. Simms to go out and look things over.

It was three or four weeks later before the Orpet letter arrived. It told of things that widened the journalist's eyes. The farmer admitted he had finally got Simms out to Lysander's home, and the doctor had found Malcolm a very sick man and "not at all himself."

At this point, Edmond, reading the letter in his little top-floor room overlooking the cobblestone street, had to sit down, and his fingers were all thumbs as he dropped his ever-lasting brown pencil stub on the floor. He realized the only thing to do was to make another hurried trip out to Wilby.

He was laying his plans for this second excursion to the north when the wire came. It was from Orpet. Lysander was dead. With communications north of York as poor as they were—in fact, a look at even a modern gazeteer does not reveal Wilby for it was too small—the details took two days to reach Milody.

Malcolm Lysander had died, of all things, of rabbies. A dead dog had been found in the basement of the house. Upon examination, it too was found to have died of the same malady. The doctor spoke of the little terrier's teeth on Lysander's wrist. This struck a reminiscent chord in Edmond's mind. The whole affair was a shock. It took some days and much concentration on his journalistic activities to make Milody push the episode even partially out of the center of his consciousness.

SUCCESS continued to attend Edmond Milody's writing efforts; nothing of a fabulous nature, but a tidy, warming appreciation on the part of his employers, publishers and the public. That is not so easy to come by in this hardest of all professions. And it was, therefore, possible for the writer to draw a happy comparison between himself and those three others whose untimely endings were variously predicted by the declining circumstances of their lives at the near end. It was a fact, however, that the journalist missed some of the human relations which might otherwise have accompanied one of his comparative charm, years, and professional proficiency. He realized, when he had them no more, that those three—Phillips, Tavener, and Lysander—were all, or nearly all, of his so-called "circle of friends" since Regiment days together.

In consequence, the journalist spent much of his time taking long walks through the great London area in which he lived,

and much time alone in his top-floor room staring moodily out the window at the rough cobblestone street and those who traversed it.

If he attended a social tea, he found that after the formalities and conventions had been dispensed with, he had little to say, as though he had lost some of the small graces. This did not worry him too much, but it placed something of a burden on Philpotts, the rooming-house landlord, who became the foil and listener to much of Milody's musings.

Philpotts was small and spare, with a distracted manner that came from many years of managing flats and fending off boarders who insisted that "something should be done" about leaking water pipes or faulty fixtures. He had, in other words, the landlord's ability to appear to be listening, when in reality he very probably was not.

This did not worry Edmond Milody. He found himself, as time passed, explaining more and more to the little superintendent. The rest of the building was occupied by plain working people whose hours were more or less regular, and often the two of them, when the journalist came back early from some publishing task, would find themselves alone in the late afternoon.

Milody would supply tea and crumpets, and happily, the superintendent found the invitation to come up to the writer's top-floor room did not stem from a desire to have the peeling plaster of the ceiling redone. It even became safe, Philpotts found after some experience at this ritual, to listen, although landlord-like, his attentive manner was outwardly impressive whether he was concentrating on the author's words or thoughts of the dog races at Essex.

Philpotts was familiar with a considerable portion of Milody's life, as a proprietor is about a long-term tenant. The deaths of both Tavener, calling for as it did the sudden trip to Liverpool, and the summons from Lysander and the explorer's resultant demise, were known to him. Too, Philpotts had certainly not less than the average curiosity about matters of mysterious portent, violence, sudden death, and the like, and it was of these things that Edmond Milody spoke.

For some reason that perhaps the journalist did not recognize himself, his out-loud musings started the narrative trend in England. If he mentioned India and that long-ago post-World War I trip, he mentioned it casually. Jehlam was a name that Philpotts never heard and probably never would hear. There was always a certain restraint about those fate-poignant days following their vacation beyond the Khyber, and it was as though by not mentioning the old black-shrouded woman with her owlet on shoulder, that she would fade from Edmond's memory. But she did not.

THERE was no skimping on details—which was the part that Philpotts' tabloid curiosity was interested in anyway—on the affairs of Milody's three friends. It never occurred to the unimaginative little superintendent, even after the fifth or sixth recital with no appreciable change in the details, that Milody told this most important story of his life, not so much for anyone else's benefit, but for his own.

"It's quite simple, Philpotts," he would aver over tea. "Things like the Indian rope trick, you know, and those witch doctors in Africa. Some men can be *frightened* to death. Others can have the fear of death put down upon them so by suggestion that they are easy prey to circumstances which wouldn't touch the rest of us. Now take the cases of my three friends—"

Philpotts would nod with an enthusiasm brought on now considerably more by the friendly tea and crumpets and the desire to please an old tenant of long-standing.

"—Bertie Phillips. If you ever go to galleries, you can still find his seascapes exhibited prominently. At one time he was considered one of our most promising artists in that genre. And yet I ask you to examine what happened to a man who allowed an idea to take possession of him beyond all reason and beyond the advice of his friends!"

At this point, the author would grow expansive. At times, so much so that the landlord would suspect that perhaps the other's tea was rather liberally spiked against the early evening chill.

"Phillips " the recital would drone on, ". was a man without peer in his

line. But he came to have a belief that to go near the water meant deadly peril for him. He came to believe, with the sort of conviction that a small child or an insane person has, that his fate was to drown. His distaste and aversion for the water grew to such an extent that he was unable to associate with the medium that made him his living. Do you follow that, Philpotts? My friend, Phillips, wouldn't go near water! The sea, lakes, anything! And yet he had nothing to sustain him. Painting was all he knew. Painting seascapes was his forte.

"Poor old Bertie. Things went from bad to worse for him. I may have told you before, Philpotts." (Yes, he had, many times!) "For some while before his death, Phillips had barely enough to live on. At times he had insufficient food!" Milody would shrug. "We tried to help him, but he retained his pride even after, shall we say, his courage deserted him. It was very sad."

The landlord would nod lacrimously. It was at this point in the story that the journalist, if there ever was any comment, would mention vaguely something about a "fortune teller."

"Yes," Edmond recounted, "it seems poor old Bertie had been told by one of these fake seeresses that he would meet an untimely end by drowning. Imagine a grown man believing such twaddle! And yet he achieved this fate in a round-about way as the result of his very fear of it. With not enough money, insufficient food and virtually no work, he got sick."

"Lungs, wasn't it?" Philpotts came to fill in at this point, almost as though on cue. After all the fare of tea and crumpet was enjoyable.

Milody nodded. "His lungs and heart gave out. I was there when he died. It was not pleasant, Philpotts. You may know, if you are conversant with medicine, that in such a case a man's lungs actually do fill up with water, and paradoxically, you can say that Bertie Phillips did 'drown'."

This called for a sad shake of Philpotts' head, a half a cup more of tea and another crumpet.

"Now take the case of my good old friend, Major Hugh Tavener. You may even know of the honors he won in the Fusileers. A fine soldier, a fine man and a fine friend. He was obsessed with a fear as all-powerful as Bertie Phillips'. The fear that he would be blown up. Well, you may say, Philpotts, a man whose life and career has been the army should have thought enough of that idea so that its aspect could no longer terrify him. And yet when you look forward to something unpleasant which has been predicted with a certainty for you, it exorcises a power and diabolical influence on your morale. In other words, the uncertainties of a soldier's life can and could be rationalized, but a certain outre prediction like that that you are to be blown up presents not only a threat but a very definite challenge."

ONCE Philpotts asked elucidation on this point: Who or what had made this threat? He understood Milody to reveal that it was a "fortune teller." No more detailed than that.

"Travener, as I have said, a man of many regimental honors, resigned from the army when—and follow this carefully, Philpotts—the army constituted his only way of life. It was all he knew. And yet because of this obsession of fear about avoiding what had been predicted for him and which conceivably could be considered more a part of a soldier's life than a civilian's; namely, the danger of dying in an explosion, he took himself out of an occupation for which he was eminently suited.

"Major Hugh's luck failed him from that time on. I remember when he moved out of his London flat into a very poor and niggardly quarters in the worst section of Liverpool. And it was there, of course, as you know, that he died in the very way that had been predicted! But you may say fairly, solely because of his frantic attempts to foil what he believed to be his destiny!

"Then, of course, and most recently in my mind was this unhappy affair of Malcolm Lysander. There, I assure you, Philpotts, was a man who I firmly believed was not afraid of anything! And yet fear caused him to give up his chosen work, exploration, and at which he had gained some small prominence. Caused him to bury himself away in a moorside cottage in one of the loneliest parts of northern England. And what was this fear? The fear that one of his

profession should have thought of many times—that he would die of a fatal bite.

"Think of it, Philpotts! A man who knew most of the dark places of the world, from the Congo to the Amazon, who'd hunted and explored in regions where poisonous snakes and dangerous animals abounded. But that is a queer commentary, my landlord friend. . " When this pompous term emerged, Philpotts always was sure Milody's tea had been spiked. . . "On human nature. That is why the ability to look into the future, as advertised by some psychics, would be such a disastrous thing if it could be proven and developed. A man will go on from day to day suffering all sorts of mental and physical tortures because hope is an innate part of human nature, and despite the unfortunate and perhaps even hopeless circumstances of his life, he will continue, as the saying goes, hope while there is life.

"If, on the other hand, he knows of a certainty that he is going to say, be sent to the gallows on a certain date and hung until he is dead, or if he knows that he will surely be dead in two months' time from an incurable and fatal disease, then his whole psychology changes. Lysander, who faced death many times, as my friend in the Fusileers, and many more times as an explorer, was, nevertheless, cowed by the mystic monstrousness of an evil prediction. The prediction that he would surely die of a fatal bite.

"He gave up his world travels, he gave up his forays into mysterious lands and buried himself away, as you know. Then, as in the two previous cases, Philpotts, an immense set of paradoxes contrived to regulate his life to its end. Far away from any menace from the natural source of his bete noir—poisonous serpents, spiders and the like are not found in England except in museums and zoos—he was, nevertheless, thrown into a paroxysm of terror by the simple item concerning an accident to a small touring circus from Europe. This circus, in touring the English countryside, had the misfortune to suffer a slight accident. One phase of that accident touched Lysander's life with a chill stroke of horror. A snake box overturned and three very poisonous species escaped into the moor country not far from Malcolm's home."

THIS part always caused Philpotts to shudder with some distaste; he could well understand any man's revulsion for serpents, and that dated from a childhood visit to the botanical gardens and its snake-house.

"Those snakes," the journalist continued, "made Lysander even more of a prisoner. He would barely go out of the door of his country home even in daylight. He received food, supplies, and word from the village through a well-paid messenger. His only companion, before and after my visit, was a little terrier dog.

"The strangeness in this case, Philpots, was that his little dog, the only member of the household who roamed the outdoors contracted rabies from some other creature, so that Lysander, fearful of the escaped snakes and imprisoning himself because of them, was, in fact, imprisoning himself with his own doom. His little pet fell ill—I noticed that on my visit; in fact, I think I recall the last occasion when the sick animal bit Malcolm.

"Now you will say and I will agree, Philpotts, that a normal man would have noticed the sickening of his pet and taken some steps about it. But Lysander was concerned with only one thing: his obsession about that 'fatal bite,' and the fact that the poisonous snakes constituted such a menacing medium. At the end when his dog finally died and Lysander, himself, might have suspected the truth and the threat, this time entirely real, to himself, he was still concerned with the intricate workings of a man's mind when it is concerned with avoiding some obsessional danger."

Philpotts, as behooved his part, would nod as he crumbled the cake plate and sipped his second or third cup of tea. It mattered not. Edmond Milody was a prompt and punctual first-of-the-month rent payer; he was also good for the largest Yuletide tip given by any of the superintendent's tenants. He did wish though at times with an inner irritation carefully masked, that the writer would not toy so everlastingly with that brown-stub pencil that was in Milody's nervous fingers if it did not adorn the breast pocket of his writing jacket.

The going-over of the story in his mind and the telling of it built Milody's self-con-

fidence concerning the matter up to some considerable height. He no longer even allowed his mind to concern itself with the remembered phrase, "to be killed by a tool of your trade." Imagine his typewriter rearing up and attacking him! Or becoming smothered by the leaves of one of his manuscripts! It was all quite absurd!

The journalist was, by nature, a rather careful man. He did not sprint for trains as a general rule or tear down the stairs to the Underground. He was a steady rather than heavy imbiber.

Time is the greatest healer of all. As the hours become days, the days, weeks, and the weeks, months; yesterday with its sadness or gladness is, after all, but a picture in the album of memory, with no more reality than the corner cinema.

So it was that Edmond Milody was really quite happy when he first heard it. It was early evening and he was lying down in his room with a slight headache, due probably to the close work entailed in correcting some material at the printer's earlier that day. There was a slight lull between the homeward-bound workers and the people yet to go out for an evening's fun, and the streets were resultantly quiet, with only now and then a lorry or cart rumbling along the cobblestones.

These occasional sounds only served to lull the author into a state bordering semi-slumber, and it was probably just then that he first became conscious of the sound. It was a screeching, at first distant but then louder, and the noise turned his sluggish mind back to that fateful trip from Liverpool after he had attended to the Tavener incident. The screeching was a train whistle, or was it something else?

His mind looked further down through the years and the events of those years, and at this, some warning instinct in him struggled to rouse him fully. It was a dreadful fight up through heavy, swirling, green water. His legs and arms were paralyzed, and yet his mind kept ordering him to wake up, to stir, to sit up and so vanquish the rising noise in his ears.

After an eternity of the struggle—don't scientists say these nightmares last but seconds?—he succeeded in gaining his full consciousness. There were no sounds now but the prosaic end-of-day ones, but the macabre screeching was still in his mind's ear.

Milody rushed to the window. He looked up and down the street for more than just a moment and then withdrew, nettled at his surging fear and resultant actions. After all, a nightmare is a nightmare. Ridiculous for a grown man to act in such a fashion! What in heaven's name was the point in trying to analyze some imaginary sound, and what did he expect to see outside in the street?

Edmond tried to ignore the wetness of his palms, rubbing them abruptly on a towel and scowling at the whitefaced image of himself in the dresser mirror.

AFTER supper, during which one of the borders remarked on his quietness, Milody took himself out to the corner cinema. The film was slapstick, and on several occasions, Edmond found himself laughing heartily. Still he turned homeward with a hesitant step as though there was something there he feared or a task he disliked. Just as he turned in at his flat, he started at a black shadow across the street. In a feeble cone of yellow light from the opposite streetlamp, the shadow turned into a hurrying laborer still in work clothes.

Milody set his mouth even tighter, thumbed his key into the lock and went upstairs to his room. He dallied with his undressing and preparations for bed, but try as he would, the time came to lie down and put out the light; and finally sleep came, and as he had known, with it the nightmare. He saw her again, the blue-veined, yellow-white skin of her hands, the mottled unhealthiness of the emaciated forearm, the haglike old face, and the owlet clinging tenaciously to her black shoulder as though it had grown there.

In the nightmare, which even his uneasy writhings could not rid himself of, the old witch-woman screamed and shrieked and the owlet spat forth curses—and all of them sounded like the whistle of the Liverpool train bringing him back from Tavener's remains. Or maybe it was the train from the north-of-England moors on his last visit to Lysander.

He woke up with a fearful start, and it

took him minutes to quell his trembling. A glass of cold water helped, but there was no more sleep that night.

The next day the journalist purchased some sleeping powders at the druggist's. He found a double dose of these helped, and he wondered if his nerve was going. The other boarders told him he was looking pale and he took a weekend in Brighton. It might have been longer, but even as he was becoming comfortably accustomed to the sun and sea air of that British south-shore resort, he was suddenly struck with an alarming realization. In the case of each of his other friends, they had run away, retreated for reasons of fear, and in the end, that very attempt to escape had proved their undoing. Was he not now following in their wayward steps?

He was packed and on the London train within the hour, later waving off Philpotts' mild, "Why, you're back sooner than we expected, Mister Milody," with the rejoinder that he had much pressing work to do.

Like all miseries that afflict the body or mind, this one of the hideous dreams reached a climax beyond which its horrors did not penetrate. It was then that Milody knew a strange and soul-satisfying security. It was as he had always believed—a fear-thought planted so deeply within all of them that it was like a cancer. It was like a speck in the eye. The more one fussed with it, the sorer it got. Without criticism of the other three, Milody objectively reasoned that whereas they had run, he had stood and fought. He freely acknowledged to himself that he had learned from their experiences, but the fact remained that he was more than ever sure that his panacea was the correct one.

It was the crowning triumph when the ugly dreams began to fade in intensity and quantity even when he desisted from use of the sleeping compound.

It was at tea-and-crumpets time with Philpotts one afternoon not much later that Milody heard the sound again. A shrieking that made him lower the cup abruptly to its saucer.

He sat transfixed for a moment, and then at Philpott's "Gracious, Mister Milody, you're white as a ghost! Is anything wrong?" the journalist got up precipitously and went to the window.

There were the usual prosaic passers-by and nothing else. He regained his composure quickly and chided himself.

"That noise, it startled me."

"What noise?"

"Don't say you didn't notice it! That sound of shrieking a moment ago."

"Can't say I did, but then I've got pretty used to these noises. Probably was a wheel squealing on that turn up at the Northstead Road intersection."

The author nodded.

But it was not more than a day or so later when he heard the sound again, this time even louder as he was seated at the dining table downstairs. He half rose, spilling a plate of broccoli, and the others stared at him.

"Don't you hear that? A a sort of shrieking or calling sound?"

They looked at him wordlessly until one of the women said, "Calm yourself, Mister Milody. It's probably Mister Philpotts' boy-of-all-work down in the basement shaking down the hot-water stove."

Philpotts nodded, and Milody sat down to finish his meal in silence.

IT WAS early nightfall when he heard the sound again and then in the morning a day later as he was dressing to go to the printer's. Both times the noise was unmistakable, but it had now taken on a peculiar hooting, birdlike quality that more than ever chilled Edmond's soul because of its significance. Both times the writer rushed to the window, but there was nothing that he could see.

The last time Edmond Milody was to hear the sound was of a warm, drab, and humid afternoon. He was alone in the flat with Philpotts. The two of them, in fact, were mounting the stairs for the ritual of tea when the noise burst upon the journalist's consciousness. He clutched at his landlord's sleeve.

"There it is! Don't you hear it, man? So loud!"

"Well, now, can't say exactly," the superintendent opined. "There are so many noises in London, Mister Milody. . ."

But the journalist was off up the stairs,

pounding upward two at a time in his frantic haste. He made his room and put his head and shoulders out the window. With the moist heat of the day, his forehead was perspiring freely. His eyes searched wildly up and down. And then the strength seemed to go out of his hands that were clutching the ledge.

For there—unless he was crazy, unless this was some ghastly hallucination born of the heat and overwork—was the one who had sought him! Or had he sought her through all these years? The same bowed old figure. The same black-ominous coverings. And that feathered blob of something perched on her shoulder as she trudged along the pavement on the opposite side of the cobblestone street towards the flat.

Milody knew then with a surging singleness of purpose that the most important mission of his life was to find that old witch-woman, to confront her on the streets outside, to speak to her, to ask her.

He remembered then with a shock that was almost like a physical impact that she ended her epitaph by mentioning that she would inherit his very quarters. With an energy and fury born of desperation, Milody turned, stumbled across his room, tore through the door of it, brushing past Philpotts as he went, and hurled himself at the stairs.

As he reached their zenith, he felt a sudden lurching change in his footing. A sliding, horrible motion, which in its speed, was tantamount to the flight of a wingless creature. As he slipped on the insignificant round thing, he catapulted down the stairs, having no consciousness in these dreadful fractional seconds but of the screeching and hooting sound in his ears. And then that, thankfully, along with all else, abruptly stopped.

IT WAS the same simple and straightforward tale that the unemotional Philpotts told the police that he also relayed to the newspaper journalists, and they, in turn, pasted it into a one-column item for their periodicals, despite the hardship of putting reader-appeal and glamor into an accidental death.

"He heard some sort of noise in the street," the little landlord satisfiedly relayed to all questioners. "He ran upstairs and in his hurry—you know, he always twiddling a round, brown pencil in his fingers—he dropped it at the head of the steps. He looked out the window and then came racing back in a terribly hurry. I think he saw some acquaintance of his. But anyway, poor Mister Milody tripped on that pencil. There was a dreadful crash. . . ." And at this point, Philpotts would point at the dent in the newel post at the bottom of the flight, which had, at one and the same time, stopped Edmond Milody's head and broken his neck.

Philpotts reflected that it was a most unfortunate thing to have happened in one of his flats, particularly with a faithful paying roomer like Mr. Milody who took one of his hard-to-rent rooms off his hands.

But every cloud has a silver lining as Philpotts was won't to say. Almost before poor Mr. Milody was cold, as you might say, he had rented the upstairs front room again. To be sure, *she* was very old, and those black robes and things looked dirty. But, pshaw! Ten pounds in advance is a tidy sum and enough to make a landlord forget about a lot of things that he otherwise can't put up with.

Philpotts did hope, however, that he wouldn't have to explain to the other tenants about that "pet bird" that perched on her shoulder. . .

Food for Demons

BY E. EVERETT EVANS

THE CLASS was breaking up now. There was a scurrying and a scraping, and a babble of cheerful young voices. Professor Fergus Judson pretended to be fumbling with some papers on his desk.

Yet the moment the way was clear he shuffled to the door, and started to slink towards the nearest exit.

At the last moment, he saw Professor Roberta Tooker coming along the hall, and beyond her, also approaching, was Professor Abe Caldwell. Judson moved quickly back to get out of sight, but the woman saw him, and hurried up to him.

"Fergus," she said, and there was concern in her throaty voice, "what's the matter with you these days?"

"Uh . . I'm not feeling well, Roberta," he mumbled, then started past her.

She made no effort to stop him. From the door he glanced back, and saw that she was still watching him thoughtfully. A moment later Caldwell reached her side, and stopped to speak to her. Judson went out sighing. They made a pleasant looking couple.

At thirty-five Roberta Tooker was the woman who fitted most of the dreams he had had during twenty-five scholarly years. He, at forty-four, considered himself a little too old for her . . but still there had been times when he had hoped.

That was over. For six weeks now he had been possessed, *literally possessed,* by a demon. It seemed incredible, it *was* fantastic, but he no longer doubted. Even as he walked slowly along beneath the beautiful old elms, he could feel the weight of it inside him. It was a pressure along his nerves and in his mind, that put a sag in his shoulders and slowed his step.

It had taken just six weeks to tinge his black hair with grey, to elongate the planes of his strongly built face, to put a droop on his mouth. Six weeks of mental torture to strip forty pounds from his body. Weeks in which he had learned to hate the *thing* within him with a hatred that consumed his strength and drained his energy.

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

Food for humans, food for non-humans—two quite different things

He must free himself—that was the purpose that burned like molten lava inside him—free himself of the horror he had brought into existence. It had been no cosmic accident of time or space that had brought this rapacious demon to him six weeks before. Judson alone had made the entry possible. His was the fault. But the effect, seemingly beyond his control, now threatened everyone within the little college town.

And yet, that moment in which he had conquered the mystery of the archaic incantation, he had known only elation. Slowly, clearly, sonorously, he'd let the cryptic syllables roll forth. Carefully, meticulously, he'd enunciated each word, each phrase that was written in faded ink on the mildewed page before him. His heavy face glowed pink and damp with the effort to be exact and precise in every orthoëpic intonation.

The incantation completed, he'd waited. At first with expectation. Then, as the moments dragged, with disappointment. There'd been no flash of blue fire, no smell of brimstone, no noise or thunder-clap. Nothing but a great silence and failure.

"Oh, I wouldn't feel that way!"

THE words had come so clearly that Professor Judson had started from his chair. He'd peered quickly around the shadow-filled room, then plunged across the carpet to the wall-switch. With a *click!* he'd flooded the room with light. But there was still nothing, no being, no shape. He was alone . . . and yet a voice not his own had spoken to him.

"Naturally you cannot see that which is not matter, and which, moreover, is within your own mind and body." The voice was flat and grating. Some of the elation that had flooded the Professor's being fled before that harsh and menacing over-tone. He sank bonelessly into his chair.

"Inside me?" he stuttered. "In-inside me!"

There was a dry chuckle—it seemed as real as that—inside his head.

"It's the safest place, you'll agree," came the smug response. "But enough of this talk." The voice became impatient, demanding. "You will lead me at once to the dwelling of some savant whose mind is . . . ah . . worthy of my attention. *I hunger!*"

Before he could speak, before he could think, Judson had felt himself *impelled* out of the room, out of the house. He was not even allowed to get his top-coat against the evening chill. And then he was walking swiftly along a dim-lit street. As he'd walked there was a stirring in his mind, and an unpleasant mumbling. Judson had had the curious feeling that something was turning the pages of his book of knowledge and memory. Names kept coming to the fore of his consciousness . Hendryx Snyder . Babbitt . and each time a muttered rejection, "No, not good enough." Wheater "Ah, that's the one!"

Judson knew that a decision had been made. By this time he was running along the shadowed, quiet streets. He saw just ahead the home of Doctor Levane Wheater, head of the department of Philosophy. He felt himself slowing.

"All right," said the demon. "That's near enough."

Fergus Judson came to a halt. He could feel the thing stirring in his mind, and a sharp lancination of ecstasy coursed through him. He almost blanked out. When he came to full consciousness again, he was striding along the walk, but *away* from Doctor Wheater's home.

"What—what happened?" he'd whispered.

"I fed!" was the satisfied answer.

That night was six weeks behind him. He had wanted to forget it, but it was ever present in his thoughts. He'd worked as he never worked before—long hours to occupy his mind and drug his body—yet still his crime pointed an inexorable finger at him. Now all its maliciousness had been made hideously vivid to him again. Yesterday, for the second time, the demon had stirred to life—and fed!

Professor Judson's unpleasant reverie ended as he left the campus and crossed the street to his home.

AT NINE o'clock that night Professor Fergus Judson sat alone in his crowded, book-lined study. The reading lamp on the desk beside him was focussed on the aged and musty manuscript he was studying. The

pale glow that barely reached out to the man threw the rest of the room into weird deepening shadows. In that dim light Judson seemed but a caricature of a man—tall, gaunt, ungainly, with spectre-like face and bony hands. He was aware of the change that the past six weeks had wrought, but pride in his personal appearance was no longer important to him.

With a sigh, now, he looked up from the manuscript. The alphabet that he'd worked out appeared flawless, and yet, in translation, the result seemed gibberish. Yet there was one fact that stood out as important. Of the one hundred and sixty-nine words the page contained, one—"sufrani"—was repeated thirteen times. *Thirteen*—metaphysically powerful. And the total wordage was *thirteen squared*—a grand cycle!

The ringing of his doorbell brought the thought to an end. Slowly, he pushed back his chair and climbed to his feet. The bell rang again, more insistently this time. Judson quickened his step, but when he reached the door he opened it reluctantly.

Roberta Tooker slipped past him into the hall. With a half-smile she shook back the kerchief that covered her dark hair.

"I was afraid you weren't going to let me in," she said.

He looked at her wordlessly. He was shocked, yet not surprised. He should have guessed that she would come.

She moved past him into the study and sank down into a chair. Her eyes frowned at him.

He had time to stiffen to her presence and to realize that he might have to tell her the truth in order to get rid of her. It was vital that she leave before her visit registered strongly enough on his mind so that the demon would notice it when it awakened a month and a half hence.

"Roberta," he said in the firmest voice, "I want you to leave at once."

She leaned back in her chair. "Throw me out," she challenged with a faint smile. "No, Fergus, I've come to find out what's wrong. You may as well tell me now."

Judson didn't argue. Swiftly he told her of his research and of the ancient incantation he had discovered. "Naturally," he said wearily, "I felt that science demanded it of me, so I tried the ritual."

Roberta's brows were knit. She seemed puzzled. "And it worked?" she asked.

Watching the changing expression on her face, Judson almost gave up. He glanced around the room. The soft rug; the hard wood of the desk and chairs; the oak-paneled walls; the hundreds of books—so real, so normal, so ordinary. And it seemed to him that he knew no words that could possible fit the other reality inside him. Then he remembered how important it was that she leave. He made the attempt.

When he had finished, she stood up. Her face was a study. "This demon," she said. She repeated the word under her breath, "demon", and her expression grew thoughtful. Then she sighed and said aloud, "You say it feeds? On what?"

He had been holding that back, watching her struggling against a pitying disbelief. Now, reluctantly, he told her. "It's the life essence or mind essence that it wants. The latter, I think, because it insists on going after men of great intelligence. But when it has fed life, too, is gone." He sighed drearily. "First, Dr. Wheater, then yesterday in the classroom, Dr. Harlan. Roberta, I'm a sickened man."

Once more he realized that he had strained her credulity. She was twisting her kerchief in her hands, on which the knuckles stood out whitely. He said gently, "Don't you think that you'd better go now?"

She came over to his desk, and stood looking down at the manuscript he had been studying.

"Is there no"—she hesitated—"no counterspell?"

He shook his head. "This is part of the same holograph, and it may be one," he explained. "But it doesn't seem to be in the same language, and I'm beginning to think that it's beyond my powers. I keep trying. . ." He broke off. "Roberta, I beg you, go! It's dangerous for you here!"

She gave him a long look, then without a further word turned and left the room. There was the sound of a door closing. Roberta was gone.

THE next afternoon, when Professor Fergus Judson opened the door into the little courtroom he knew at once that he was late—the inquest into the untimely

death of Doctor Willis Harland had already begun.

He saw, almost immedately, Roberta Tooker and Abe Caldwell, seated near the center of the room. It startled him. Had Roberta told Caldwell? It seemed almost unbelievable that she could have done so, that she could thus have violated his confidence. But why else should they be here, together?

Judson sank into a rear corner seat, and made himself as inconspicuous as possible. The preliminaries were apparently over, for the Coroner was just calling Dr. Hobart Preston, who had performed the autopsy, to the stand. It was quickly established that he was head of the department of surgery at the State University, which qualified him as an expert. Then the Coroner began his questioning.

"Just what did you find in the autopsy, Doctor Preston?'

"That's just it. I couldn't find a single unusual feature to show why Doctor Harlan should have died. He seemed in very good health generally—only the little usual weaknesses here and there that are to be expected in a man of his age, I would say that his heart was unusually sound; I could find no signs of cancer, no stomach or other digestive ailments, no blood clots or internal bleeding, no brain injury."

"You mean, then," the Coroner asked, "that there is nothing to indicate that this was more than an ordinary death from causes unknown?"

"Just so, as far as I could determine."

"Thank you, Doctor Preston. You may step down. Call John Stover to the stand."

When sworn in, Stover disclosed that he was one of Dr. Harlan's students, and had been present at that fatal lecture. "The Doctor was right in the midst of his discourse, talking in his usual forceful way," Stover testified. "Suddenly he broke off in the middle of a word. His face showed astonishment, then pain, and he dropped to the floor as though he had been pole-axed. When we rushed up to the rostrum, he was dead."

The room was hushed. Muted sounds were coming in through the opened windows. Judson sat with lowered eyes, listening intently.

Dr. Preston asked permission to take the stand again. "There was one odd thing which I didn't mention before," the noted doctor explained. "I don't know if or what it means, but every individual cell seemed to be dead, especially those of the brain. They seemed to have deteriorated with unusual rapidity."

"Yet this was not the result of an injury to the brain?" the Coroner interrupted.

"No, I'm quite sure that it was not. It is what occurs normally after death, yet usually after a much longer period, when the body itself begins to disintegrate."

There was a stir in the audience, and a tall figure stood up. "Mr. Coroner, may I ask the Doctor a question?"

Fergus Judson snapped to attention at the sound of that voice. It was Caldwell.

"Yes," the Coroner agreed, "if it is pertinent to this inquiry."

"The Doctor has intimated that no science we know can account for this death," Caldwell said, speaking slowly and clearly. "I should like to ask the Doctor, then, if this death could have been caused by a demon?"

The famous surgeon on the stand looked startled, hesitated, then flushed scarlet. "Certainly not!" he snapped.

Judson heard an angry murmur from the audience. He saw that Roberta was pulling on Caldwell's arm, attempting to make him sit down and keep quiet. Her face was impatient, angry.

The Coroner rapped his gavel. "This is not the place for such levity," he said severely.

Caldwell remained perfectly calm, then turned to leave the room. He spied Judson, and for a moment his stride paused, as he looked sardonically straight into the eyes of his rival. Then he stalked out of the courtroom.

Judson had his answer. Roberta had told.

THE next few weeks were ones of increasing torment to Fergus Judson. His health deteriorated; he became listless and absent-minded so that his work at the college suffered severely. Students and colleagues looked at him curiously every time he crossed the campus or came into the lecture room.

Roberta was plainly avoiding him. Just

as he had tried to evade her when he first found himself possessed by the demon, so now she took to slipping into other rooms, to turning corners when he was approaching.

But one day at the beginning of the fifth week they came face to face on the campus. She smiled at him and held out her hand. Judson eagerly took the outstretched hand . . . and started to feel the folded paper in it. Roberta did not speak. With a quick, sliding motion she freed her hand and was past him.

He opened the paper and read: "Prof. William Newlon, leading authority on dead languages, Centreville University." And underneath that, "your next victim."

Judson sank weakly onto a nearby bench. *Select* the victims for the demon! That was no better than murder! How could Roberta . . . he could not complete the thought.

Neither, he found, could he dismiss the concept from his mind. Slowly, unwillingly, he began to see a modicum of logic in the plan she must have in mind.

Newlon was in his eighties, had retired from active teaching and writing. Since it had become apparent that Judson could not prevent the demon from feeding when and where it willed, it was possible that she was right in suggesting that he try to steer it towards selected men who had lived their lives, who had the weight of years upon them, rather than younger men who were still in their prime of usefulness to the world.

So, Judson was in Centreville on the day when the demon next awoke. When he felt that sinister probing of his mind, he concentrated upon Professor Newlon; held insistently to the thought that this man had tremendous mental abilities and knowledge. After the sadistic orgy of devouring, Judson felt the demon mentally patting him on the back. "Now, that's the proper spirit. Cooperate with me and we'll get along fine. I can do things for you, you know. You're beginning to get sensible."

It soon became apparent that Roberta was keeping careful track of the weeks. Shortly before each feeding time she would make it a point to contact Judson briefly, although she carefully avoided him at all other times. There would be the inevitable slip of paper containing the name and address of some aging but still noted authority of dead languages, anthropology or orthoëpics.

Judson began, too, to notice that his own knowledge was increasing immensely. It was apparent that the demon was unable—or did not bother—to isolate to itself the information it gained.

Most important, each of the new minds was giving Judson additional knowledge which he needed and at once put to work at the deciphering of that parchment whose translation was his most urgent work at this time. Now it was becoming clearer to him where he had made his mistakes in the original translation, clearer what the aged manuscript really was.

HE SAT musing one evening. Was *this* Roberta's plan? For a moment he let his thoughts rest, not on her plan, but on the woman herself, and his dreams of her. But quickly blanked out such thoughts as best he could. They must never take any unnecessary chances of the demon becoming aware of her, of her keen mind.

He switched his thoughts to Abe Caldwell. He was certain that the man knew about his secret, was using that knowledge not only to further his own suit with Roberta Tooker, but also to discredit Judson. On their occasional meetings, Caldwell merely looked at Judson with a sneering smile. But one day he stopped squarely in front of him.

"Fergus," he said coldly, "it would be advisable for you to stay away from Miss Tooker, in view of the fact that you have," he tapped his head, "a tenant. It isn't safe for her."

Judson glared back at him, but didn't trust himself to reply. Yet the fact that his rival had warned him away from Roberta gave Judson a brief yet ecstatic hope. Caldwell must believe that they were frequently together. Apparently, then, Roberta had not given the man her complete confidence.

"I ought to set the demon after Caldwell," Judson ruminated bitterly. "But I just can't do it. Perhaps Roberta does love him, perhaps he can make her happy. I love her far too much to dare tamper with her possible happiness in any way."

FERGUS JUDSON grew more uneasy and perturbed as the months crawled by. It seemed impossible that he was not becoming suspect . . . nor were his fears unjustified. It came when he had just turned away from the house where the demon had completed its sixth feeding. He had not gone a block down the still, night-shaded street when a police car drew up alongside the curb, and two uniformed men sprang out to confront him.

"You Professor Fergus Judson?"

"Yes," surprised.

"Professor James Locksley just died. You'll have to come along with us."

At the station it was soon apparent that the police were baffled. There was no evidence of murder in this death. Yet they had had an anonymous note warning them to be on the lookout for Judson if any member of the college faculty died. And they had found him less than a block away. They questioned him for long hours, but could get nothing from him in the way of direct evidence.

As he returned home, freed at last of their questionings, Fergus Judson knew that he had Abe Caldwell to thank for what he had just suffered. Knew, too, that Caldwell had done his worst and was no longer important. Now Judson had worse worries.

For when Judson had been taken to the police station the demon had not yet fallen into that strange digestive stupor that claimed it after each feeding. It had stayed awake, a silent witness to the questioning, had sometimes prompted the answers which Judson was forced to make, had established a mental control that made it impossible for the Professor to make a complete confession of the guilt he felt so keenly, as he would gladly have done; as he tried so valiantly to do.

Now, on the way home, the demon prosecuted its own inquisition of Judson. Slowly, relentlessly, it turned the man's mind inside out in the process of finding out what was back of all this sudden inquiry into the relationship between Judson and these many deaths.

Fight and struggle as he might, Judson was powerless before the uncanny mental abilities of the demon.

"So you've told the whole story to this Professor Roberta Tooker?" Judson flinched under the exquisite pain. "And . . this woman has as great a mind as any in this community? Hmmm, it is seldom that I get a really fine female mind for food. It should be most interesting. I shall use her as one of my little repasts." There was a last spasmodic but deliberate stricture, then Judson was released from the torture.

A week later, when he was sure that the demon was sleeping soundly, Judson made it a point to waylay Roberta, and demanded that she listen to him a moment. He rapidly related the recent events, the scene with the demon.

"So you see, Roberta, you are definitely on its list. But here is something that I feel may help. It is the translation of that ancient manuscript you saw. I was stuck on it until after I began *knowing* more after each of my demon's feedings. That was your plan, wasn't it? Well, now I feel positive that I have a correct translation. I believe it will protect you, keep it and study it carefully."

He hurried away, lest the demon notice their meeting. Nor did he see Roberta, close-up, until about a month later, when she passed him swiftly, without speaking, but once more a piece of paper was slipped into his hand. On it he read an address, but no name. He shook his head, wondering.

WHEN the demon awoke a week later, it demanded to be taken to Roberta Tooker's home. Then Fergus Judson rebelled.

"I won't go near her!" he stormed. "I'll kill myself before I'll let you have her!"

He tried to open the drawer of his desk where his revolver lay, but the demon seized his motor nerves, and his hand would not move.

"You fool!" the demon sneered. "How can you stop me? Don't you yet realize my powers? Haven't you even realized that I don't need you as my carrier—that having been evoked I can now transfer to any body I desire? I've felt a bit of gratitude to you for opening the Way, but don't try my patience too far, or I'll feed on your own not-too-unintelligent mind, and find another host. Now, no more idle arguments. Take me to Roberta Tooker—this instant!"

Raging but impotent, viciously scourged with sadistic mental whips, Judson was impelled out of his house. As his unwilling feet dragged along, the shrill, sneering laugh of the demon rang and echoed through his mind.

But suddenly a desperate calm came over Professor Fergus Judson. "*Now!*" he thought, "*now or never!*" He stood stock-still in the middle of the sidewalk, and began repeating the words of incantation of which he had given Roberta a copy. In spite of the attempts of the demon to interrupt him—it almost seemed as though its power was in abeyance to some extent while he was saying the words—Judson's voice grew more and more steady and unhurried. He fumbled once, but recovered and went on. Word by word he recited it.

Finished, he waited. There was silence. For a long, long minute the whole world seemed still and hushed. Even the demon seemed to be holding its breath in expectant dread.

Then a raucous bellow of contemptuous laughter seemed to split Judson's head. He reeled, as a blinding mushroom of corruscating light flamed behind his eyes. "What are we wasting time for?" the demon shrieked triumphantly. "You can't even stop me that way! Come on, get going!"

Beaten, Fergus Judson was propelled along the elm-shaded street. The usually beautiful lawns and flower-beds seemed sere and lifeless; the comfortable, cheerful homes but empty and tumbled shadows. Closer they came to Roberta's home. Each step was still fiercely contested, yet Judson knew the certainty of defeat.

Stopping at last on the walk leading to the house, Judson waited for the now-familiar orgiastic thrill that told him the demon was feeding.

But none came! Instead, he felt the rising, furious anger of his tenant. He sensed that it was unable to find Roberta's mind within the house.

At the demon's insistence, Judson rang the bell. The maid, when she appeared, informed him that Miss Tooker was away. "She goes away ever six weeks now," she stated. "I think she visits her folks."

"Pretty smart," the demon growled. "Well, it really doesn't matter. We'll get her another time. Now, go to the address she gave you."

Fergus Judson was stunned to find that the demon knew about the slips of paper. But he was being forced along the street, still resisting with every force of ingenuity, of will, and of mind—but futilely.

FINALLY they arrived at the house whose address Roberta had furnished. It was a little house, painted white, set deep in its wooded acre. Judson sank ever more deeply into a desponding gloom as he trudged wearily along the willow-lined driveway. He stopped at the foot of the steps leading up to the verandah.

Suddenly he grew aware that the demon was vastly disturbed, uneasy. This uneasiness grew even while Judson was being impelled up the steps and into the house, which he entered without even bothering to knock.

Roberta Tooker stood in the living room doorway, dressed entirely in white, figure tense but a very slight smile on her lips. Judson had a distinct awareness of the demon's surprise at sight of her. It seemed disconcerted and puzzled that it had not—still could not—sense the presence of her mind.

Roberta gazed at Judson with tense earnestness. "*You've* got to say that *repeated* word, Fergus!" she said in a piercing tone. "I can't pronounce it correctly. I've spoken the entire incantation, except for that word. And I know it's working—something powerful is protecting me already. But it apparently has to have that name-word to materialize completely. Fergus quick, *say the word!*"

"W-word?" stuttered Judson.

He could feel the demon squirming and writhing, trying frenziedly to blank out his memory. Its desperation was terribly obvious. "I'll feed on your mind!" it thundered. "Get out of here—fast!"

The Professor knew a compulsion, felt his legs moving frantically. Yet the demon's very panic heartened Judson. He threw himself on the floor. "I'll not go!" he snarled.

Heartened and aided by her love, by her own considerable abilities, he was fighting again, with all his strength, with all his will, trying to increase his power with a

direct negation of the demon's ability to control or harm him. His hands tried to hold onto the rug, then the living room furniture, the doorway, the hall rug. There was a slaverous threshing inside his mind, and then—horrible sensation—the unmistakable gnawing at the fringes of his mentality.

Judson nearly fainted. Still, as from a great distance, again and again he heard the shrill demanding of Roberta's voice:

"Fergus, oh, Fergus darling, *speak the . . . word!*"

Word? he thought numbly. He had believed there were no difficult words in the incantation, at least not for him. And the thirteen-times repeated word, about which Roberta seemed so intense, was particularly easy if you understood that the *"u"* was more of an *"ae"* sound, deriving as it did from. . . .

He stopped there. *"SUFRANI!"* he shouted.

IT WAS was an illusion of substance, a shadow in an unlighted world. It was a whisper where there was no sound, a movement in a motionless dimension.

It was born, It was created, It was self-conceived, It was a product of evolution—terms meaningless because mutually exclusive. And still, somehow, incomprehensibly yet intrinsically true.

It was a thought, an idea, a concept, a perception, and an apperception.

It was Being, and It was non-Being. It was Positiveness, and It was Negation. It was Matter, and It was Void.

It was micro-cosmic, and It was Macro-Cosmic.

Time and Space had no meanings as far as It was concerned. So there was no way of telling when or where It first came to Consciousness. It might have been a million million million eons ago, it might have been Today. It might have been in some unknown and unknowable dimension or far universe, it might have been HERE.

Its knowledge was starkly inconceivable, yet It was greedy and thirsty for more and greater knowledge. Everything everywhere everywhen was of interest to It. And as Its knowledge increased, so did Its great powers.

Nor was It hungry only for knowledge. Suddenly, It received a *summons!*

ALMOST instantaneously, as *the word* left Professor Fergus Judson's lips, a great peace came to him. The torture, the lashing pain ceased, and he was suffused with a sublimity, a greatness, an awed wonder as though the whole cosmos had unfolded itself to his innermost understanding. For a grandeured instant it seemed as though he possessed all knowledge. There was an ineffable blessing of deep content and repose, of knowledge that he had been healed mentally, physically and psychiatically; an assurance that he would be no longer troubled.

Then he was *alone.*

The demon had vanished, utterly gone, and he knew that it could never return. So, too, had departed as tracelessly that that mighty . . . *Essence* which had come so fortuitously at their summons.

Professor Fergus Judson saw then the face of Roberta Tooker bending over him, her eyes bright with happy tears, her lips soft and tremulous. He fumbled for her hand. Their lips touched. And then, sighing, his head slipped down again to the rug.

Contentedly, he slept.

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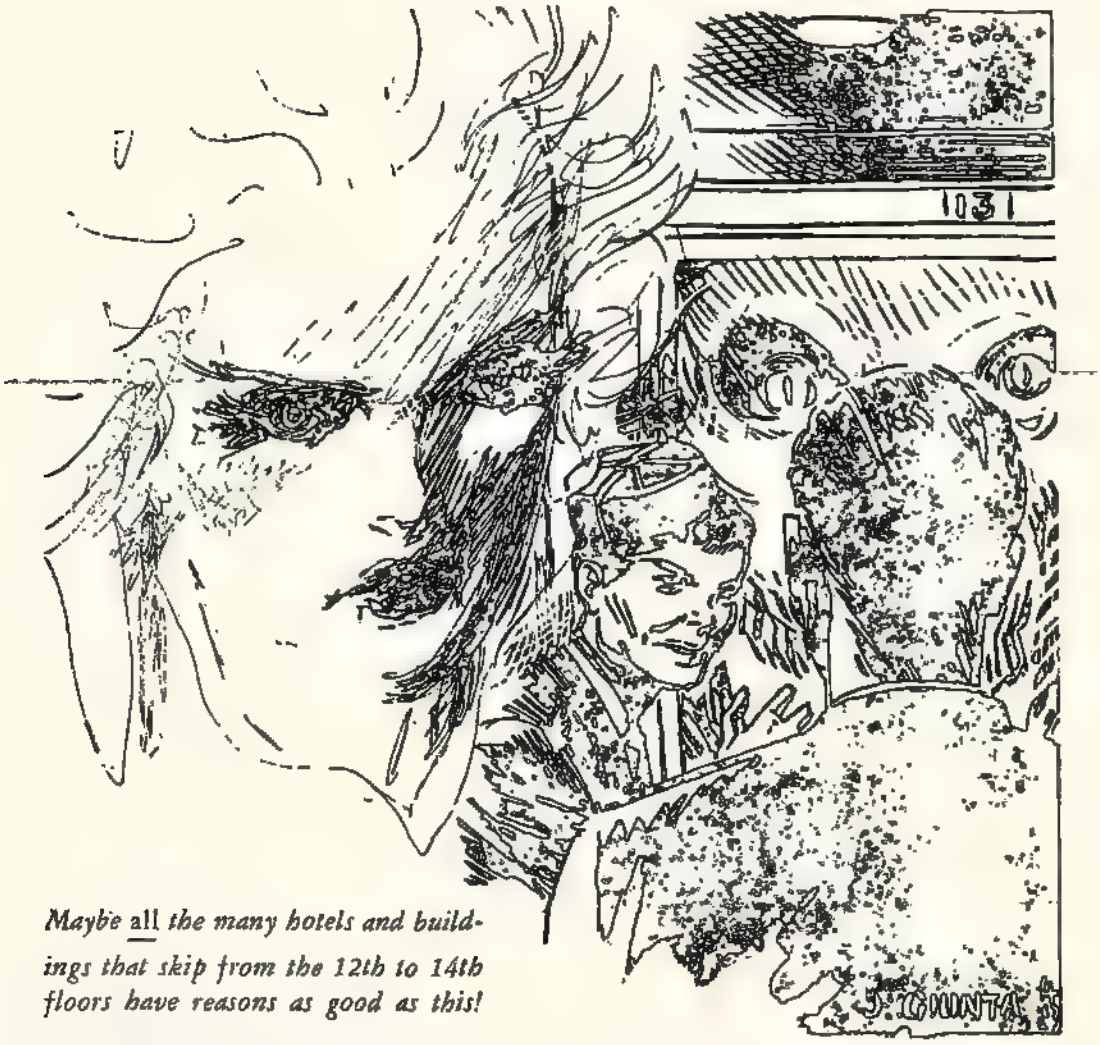
The Thirteenth Floor

BY FRANK GRUBER



Maybe all the many hotels and buildings that skip from the 12th to 14th floors have reasons as good as this!

THE motto of *The Bonanza Store* was: "If *The Bonanza* Hasn't Got It, It Isn't." Now and then, friends and an occasional rash employee suggested to Alf Orpington that the wording of the motto was a trifle ambiguous, but the owner of *The Bonanza* did not take kindly to criticism.

"Our store sells everythng," he would snort, "and if we haven't got it, there just isn't such a thing. That's what the motto says."

It was a big store. It covered an entire block on State Street and towered eighteen stories into the sky. You could buy a spool of thread in *The Bonanza* and you could get

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

complete equipment for an eight months' safari into the Belgian Congo.

The Bonanza was Javelin's last hope; if he couldn't get what he wanted here, he would have to have it made, which meant putting off the trip at least another week. He didn't really expect to find it in a department store, but he had seen the motto in the store's newspaper advertisements that morning and it was worth a trial.

So he let the women buffet him along toward the elevators. There was a sale of print dresses on the third floor and you know what print dresses do to women.

There was an octagonal information booth in the center of the store and Javelin tried to get to it, but the sea of prospective print dress buyers was too strong and he was swept helplessly to the banks of elevators. There were two of six elevators each and the women poured into the cages and filled them to capacity. When the door of one closed, they attacked another. Javelin moved with the ladies, but he never quite got his foot into one of the elevators. The women somehow always managed to elbow him aside. He was left standing outside of Elevator No. 8, then No. 7 and finally No. 6 and No. 5.

"Strategy," he thought grimly. "I'll beat them by strategy."

And so he moved from Elevator No. 5 all the way back to No. 12. He planted himself squarely in front of the door. It would take a few minutes, but he'd be damned if they'd budge him from this door. When it opened he would step inside. And no wave of women would wash him aside.

. . . The door of Elevator No. 12 opened and a freckle-faced youth of nineteen or twenty grinned at him. "Going up?"

Javelin shot a quick look off to the right. Women were storming determinedly into Elevator No. 4.

"Up," he said and stepped nimbly into Elevator No. 12.

The operator let the door swing shut and looked at Javelin, an inquiry in his eyes.

Surprised, Javelin asked: "Nobody else?"

"Not this trip. . . . Floor?"

"I don't know," Javelin said. "As a matter of fact, I don't even know if the store carries what I'm looking for."

The freckle-faced youth chuckled. "The motto of *The Bonanza Store*, is . . ."

". . . 'If The Bonanza Hasn't Got It, It Isn't'. . . ."

"Right, sir."

"I'm looking for a distilling outfit. It's a copper tank, with coils of copper tubing. It's used for distilling water. . . ."

"Are you kidding?"

Javelin looked sharply at the elevator operator. "Not at all. Where I'm going you can't drink the water because it's always contaminated. ."

"Oh, sure. We have that trouble right here in Chicago. Lots of people can't drink Lake Michigan water. That's why they buy these, uh, distilling outfits. . . . Thirteenth floor. . . ."

The elevator operator pushed down his lever and the cage shot skywards. Javelin frowned at the black floor numbers as they shot past him—5, 6, 7, 8. . . .

The speed of the elevator began to decrease. No. 13 appeared and the car came to a halt. The elevator operator reached for the door, but did not open it at once.

"You know what I been thinking—all these people buying these, ah, distilling outfits ." He leaned toward Javelin and closed one eye. "Could it be that *some* of them use them to make a little hooch?"

Javelin shrugged. "They were used for that in the old prohibition days, yes."

The boy swung open the door of the thirteenth floor. "Yeah, in the old prohibition days." He grunted. "Wise guy!"

JAVELIN stepped out of the elevator, turned to look back at the freckle-faced youth. But the door was already swinging shut. He shook his head and walked forward, through an aisle oddly deserted, and another, in which there wasn't even a salesgirl. It was then that Javelin stopped. The main floor of the store had been jammed with shoppers. Many of them had gone only to the third floor print dress sale, but this was the middle of the afternoon and it was only logical that shoppers should have penetrated to the upper floors.

But the floor was completely deserted. Merchandise there was, on the counters and on the shelves. But where were the buyers? And the salespeople?

Javelin reached a center aisle, turned right and passed into another department. And

still his own footsteps were the only sounds he heard.

He cleared his throat. "Hello," he called suddenly. "Is anybody here?"

There was no response. Not even an echo. Javelin stopped again. He looked up an aisle to the right, down one to the left and then turned clear around and looked back in the direction he had come. Not a living soul was in sight.

Javelin became aware suddenly of the chilliness of the air in the store. "That's the trouble with this air conditioning," he thought. "Either it doesn't work at all, or it works too well and you have to wear an overcoat indoors."

He drew a deep breath and essayed into another aisle. It was as deserted as the previous ones. Suddenly irked, Javelin wheeled and headed in the general direction of the elevators.

"Yes?" said a voice. "What can I do for you?"

Startled, Javelin whirled. A tall young man in a blue suit and wearing a white carnation smiled at him.

"What kind of a store do you call this?" Javelin exclaimed. "The place is like a morgue. No salespeople, no customers."

The man smiled pleasantly. "Is there anything special you wanted?"

"Yes," Javelin snapped. "A water distilling outfit."

"Of course, sir."

Javelin was surprised. "You have them?"

"*The Bonanza* carries everything. If you'll step this way. . . ."

The floorwalker turned, walked a few yards, then made a sharp right turn and led the way to another aisle, a department displaying kettles of all shapes and sizes and a vast amount of copper tubing, as well as all the paraphernalia that went with a distilling outfit; malt, hops, filters, bottles, caps and bottling machines.

A girl stood behind one of the counters writing in an order book.

"Miss Carmichael," the floorwalker said, smoothly. "Will you show this gentleman a distilling outfit?"

The girl looked up and Javelin had to resist an involuntary desire to whistle long and low. The girl was young, not more than twenty or twenty-one. She was tall and slender, with finely chiseled features, hair like spun gold and the smoothest skin in all Chicago.

She smiled at Javelin, exposing teeth so white and even that they seemed to have been capped by a Hollywood dentist, yet could not have been.

"How large an outfit were you thinking of?" she asked. She came out from behind the counter and crossed to a display of copperware.

Javelin stared at her as open-mouthed as a Bremer County, Iowa, youth seeing Hedy Lamarr for the first time. She reached the distillers, turned and looked at Javelin, still standing on the spot from where he had first spied her.

"If you'll step over here, please. . . ."

Javelin came alive. He moved toward the girl. "I'll take it," he said.

"Which one?"

"Any one of them; it doesn't matter."

"But you must have had a certain size in mind."

"Yes, of course."

"Well. . . ?" Her lips parted in an amused smile.

Javelin blinked and shook his head to change the burning focus of his eyes. They lit upon a gleaming copper kettle. "This one's too small."

"It's five gallons."

"I'll need at least a ten-gallon size. You see, I'm going on a trip up the Amazon and there'll be eight or ten men in the party. We'll need a lot of water. . . ." He stopped, for Miss Carmichael's smile had reached great proportions. He looked at her in surprise. "I beg your pardon?"

The smile disappeared. "I'm sorry."

"Why should you be sorry?"

"Because of what I was—well, thinking. . . ."

"*What* were you thinking?"

SHE looked past him and a tiny frown creased her smooth forehead. Javelin glanced over his shoulder and met the look of the immaculate floorwalker, who was standing some twenty feet away, a disapproving expression on his face.

He turned back to the salesgirl.

She said: "There's no law against a man buying a distilling outfit; if he wants to say

that it's for the purpose of distilling water, why . . ."

"But it is!"

"Of course, it is."

Javelin frowned. It seemed suddenly very important to him that the salesgirl should believe him. "Look," he said, "I know what these outfits were used for in the old days. I suppose there are some thrifty souls who still use them for that. But I assure you, I never acquired a taste for home-made hooch. I much prefer to buy my Lord Calvert whiskey in the nearest liquor store."

"Oh, yes, at the nearest liquor store." The salesgirl's eyes crinkled. "Now, here's a lovely ten-gallon sti—, distilling outfit. . . ."

"How much is it?"

"Just the tank, or the complete outfit?"

"Complete."

"With condensing coils, $49.75."

Javelin took out his wallet and extracted a fifty-dollar bill. "Could you have it sent to the Alonzo Apartments?"

"Just a moment." The girl went back to the counter and picked up her salesbook and pencil. "The Alonzo Apartments, Mr. . . . ?"

"Dick, I mean Richard Javelin. Alonzo Apartments, East Ohio Street."

The girl wrote rapidly in her salesbook. Looking down at the top of her head, Javelin asked: "What time does the store close?"

"Six o'clock," she replied, without looking up.

Javelin cleared his throat, swallowed hard. "I, uh, was thinking, I mean, I wonder, would you go somewhere and have a drink with me, or perhaps dinner?"

She finished writing, took the fifty dollars from him and stepping to a cash register, rang up the sale. She returned with a quarter change.

"The employees' entrance," she said, "about five minutes after six." She handed him the duplicate sales slip.

"Great," he exulted. "I'll be waiting for you."

She smiled faintly, said, "Thank you, Mr. Javelin," in a clear tone and stooped to make a further notation in her salesbook.

Javelin turned away. At the end of the aisle, the floorwalker stood where he had been during Javelin's entire time in the department.

"Did you get what you wanted?" he asked.

"Everything," replied Javelin.

He passed the floorwalker, made a right turn and discovered that the elevators were straight ahead. He pushed the pearl button for "Down" and the door of Elevator No. 12 opened instantly, smoothly.

The freckle-faced young operator smiled at Javelin.

"Service, sir, that's my motto."

"I thought it was: 'If *The Bonanza* Hasn't Got it, It Isn't?' "

"That's the store's motto; my personal one is, 'Service, sir.' "

The elevator door slipped shut and the cage began descending swiftly. "Get what you wanted?" the operator asked, looking at Javelin over his shoulder.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Sorry? Why should you be sorry?"

The boy shook his head, smiled wanly and brought the elevator to a stop. "Main floor," he announced.

The door opened and Javelin stepped out into a yawning maw of women, still seeking print dresses. He struggled through the waves of femininity and at last reached the street.

AT FIVE minutes to six Javelin entered the alley between State and Wabash. He found a set of metal-sheathed doors on which was painted: *"The Bonanza Store, Employees' Entrance"* and lighting a cigarette, leaned against the wall.

A smile of anticipation played over his lips.

He threw away the cigarette when the doors were opened and women and girls began to pour into the alley. They came in a steady, hurrying stream, glad to leave the store, anxious to get to their homes, their trysts. Inside the doors the time clocks beat a steady ping, ping as the employees' cards were stamped.

Men came out, too; stock-clerks, floorwalkers, elevator operators, managers and assistant managers. But mostly there were girls and women, hundreds and hundreds of them.

Five minutes after six, ten minutes after. The stream became a trickle, diminished to

a drip. Twenty minutes after six and only a man or two came out.

Javelin stepped into the doorway. A uniformed watchman looked inquiringly at him.

"I'm waiting for a young lady."

The watchman shrugged. "About all out, I guess." He looked at the batteries of time cards, stuck in their metal slots on the wall. "Yep."

"But I've been waiting here since before six." Javelin frowned. "She couldn't have left early?"

"Not that I know of. What's her name?"

"Carmichael."

The watchman stepped up to the racks of time cards, ran a stubby finger down them. "A, B, C. . . Carmen, Carpenter, Carter . . . no Carmichael."

Impulsively, Javelin exclaimed, "Carmichael. C-a-r-m-i-c-h-a-e-l."

"I can spell. Don't no Carmichael work here."

"But I met her upstairs. The floorwalker gave me her name."

"Sorry; if her name was Carmichael there'd be a card here." The watchman put his tongue into his cheek. "Maybe he was her boy-friend and gave you a bum steer on purpose. Could be."

Chagrined, Javelin turned away. He left the alley and walked slowly to State Street. He passed every one of the customers' doors, then retracted his steps. But it was no use. The store was tightly closed for the night. Only charwomen and watchmen were inside.

Javelin spent a miserable evening. He had several drinks in a bar, went to a movie and was so restless that he left within fifteen minutes. He returned to his apartment and went to bed. And then remained awake until long past two a.m.

AT NINE-THIRTY in the morning Javelin entered The Bonanza Store. The print dress sale was apparently over, at least the crush of women on the main floor was not as great as the day before. Javelin got to the elevator banks with only minor jostling. He entered a car. There were already several passengers inside and a half-dozen more got in after Javelin. Then a signal from the starter caused the operator, a chunky, uniformed girl, to close the doors.

"Second floor," she droned. "Ladies' millinery, gloves, handbags, accessories. . . ."

The elevator stopped at the second floor, let open a few women and took on some. It worked its way gradually upward, stopping at every floor. When it reached the tenth floor, there were only two passengers left besides Javelin. One got off on the eleventh floor and the other on the twelfth.

"Thirteen, please," Javelin said.

"Ain't no thirteenth floor," the operator said. "You want fourteen. . . ."

"No," Javelin said, promptly. "I want the thirteenth."

The girl looked around. "This building doesn't have a thirteenth floor. It jumps from twelve to fourteen. Some people are superstitious. . ." She brought the car to a halt at the fourteenth floor. "This is really the thirteenth floor, only we call it the fourteenth. . . ."

Javelin looked out upon departments he had never seen before; a floor with salespeople and a sprinkling of customers, a floor that seemed to carry only furniture.

He shook his head. "I was in the store yesterday," he said patiently. "On the *thirteenth* floor. I purchased something here."

The girl shrugged. "Ain't this the floor?"

"It wasn't furniture I bought."

"All right, mister, I'll take you back to the twelfth floor." The girl let the door swing shut and dropped the elevator one floor. She opened the door. "Is this it?"

Javelin looked out upon a sea of curtains, drapes, window shades. "No, this isn't the floor. And it *was* the thirteenth!"

"It wasn't the twelfth floor and it wasn't the fourteenth," the operator said patiently. "It was the thirteenth . . . only we ain't got no thirteenth floor in the store. I oughtta know, mister. I work here. Believe it or not, I jockey this cage up and down all day long from nine-thirty to six. I been doing it for more'n a year. I've never seen no thirteenth floor. . . . Now, you wanna go down to the main floor and ask Information?"

"Yes."

The operator closed the door and descended to the main floor, taking on a few passengers as she went along. The car disgorged a full load on the first floor.

Still angry Javelin made his way to the

octagonal information booth in the center of the store. It was presided over by two middle-aged women.

"Can you tell me on what floor the distilling outfits are?" He asked one of the women.

"Dis-distilling, did you say?"

"Distilling. They're copper kettles, or tanks, with a coil of tubing. . ."

"Mmm," said the woman, "that ought to be kitchenware, or hardware, maybe. Yes, try hardware, seventh floor."

"It's on the thirteenth floor," Javelin said, firmly.

"We have no thirteenth floor."

Smiling thinly, Javelin reached into his pocket and brought out a folded slip of paper. "Thirteen," he said, "See! I bought it. He stopped, his eyes on the sales slip.

The entry read: *"1 distil. complete—$49.75."* Above was his name and address: *"Richard Javelin, Alonzo Apartments, East Ohio St."*

That was correct. But there was an error above the name. The date.

The information clerk's voice said: "If you'll let me see the sales slip . . ."

She took it from Javelin's hand, glanced at it, then inhaled sharply. "You say you made this purchase *yesterday?"*

"Yes," said Javelin. "On the thirteenth floor."

The woman drew a deep breath and raised her head. "Mr. Ungerman!" she called in a loud voice.

A heavy-set, balding man with a red carnation in his coat lapel, came up. "Yes, Miss Sundstrom?"

"This gentleman," began the information woman, then frowning, thrust the sales slip into Mr. Ungerman's hand. "Just take a look at this!"

Mr. Ungerman looked at the sales slip and looked at Javelin. "One of our old-type sales slips. What did you want to know about it?"

"I bought that merchandise yesterday," Javelin said. "I want to see the salesclerk who sold it to me."

Mr. Ungerman's lips formed a great pout, which moved in and out. "Umm, yes, I see. You say you, ah, made this purchase *yesterday?"*

"That's right."

"Umm, and what is wrong with it?"

"Nothing. I haven't even received it yet. It's just—"

Mr. Ungerman reached out and touched Javelin's sleeve—lightly. "Would you mind stepping this way, please."

He smiled unctuously and moved off swiftly, looking over his shoulder to see that Javelin was following. Javelin trailed him to the elevators, then into a narrow aisle that led to a paneled office door.

MR. UNGERMAN opened the office door and stood aside for Javelin to enter. The room contained a mahogany desk and a battery of steel files. A heavy-set man with a cigar in his mouth sat behind the desk.

"Mr. Bailey," Mr. Ungerman said, "an unusual, shall we say, situation has arisen. This gentleman has one of our old sales slips here—one which we haven't used for years—and maintains that he made the purchase only yesterday. He asks for a refund. . ."

"I'm not asking for any refund," Javelin snapped.

"No?" asked Mr. Bailey. "Then what's the beef?"

Javelin's eyes narrowed. "Store dick, eh?"

"Store protection service," Mr. Bailey said, smoothly. He held out a meaty hand and Mr. Ungerman, pressing forward, put the sales slip into it.

Mr. Bailey took one look at the piece of paper. "Nineteen thirty-two!" he grunted. "That's a heluva long time ago."

"The clerk made a mistake," Javelin said, savagely. "I got that slip yesterday."

". . . And one of our old-time sales slips," Mr. Bailey went on. "What's this? *'1 distil. complete, $49.75?'"* He looked up at Mr. Ungerman.

Mr. Ungerman raised his shoulders expressively.

"It's a distilling outfit," Javelin said.

Mr. Bailey's eyes gleamed. "An old prohibition still?" He appealed to Mr. Ungerman. "Do we still sell them?"

"I haven't seen one in years."

"They went out with repeal. I thought so." The store detective got to his feet. "Just what's the game, Mister?"

"There isn't any game," Javelin said, tautly. "I'm not trying to get a refund. I'm not trying to swindle the store. I want to see the sales clerk who sold me this outfit. Is there any law against that?"

"Why do you want to see her?"

"I made a date with her. She didn't show up. They tell me it happens right along, but it's never happened to me before. I want to ask her why she stood me up."

"Oh, do you, now? And you figure the store should help you, eh? 'The customer's always right.' Well, Mr. Jav'lin, or whatever your name is, The Bonanza Store has a rule—salesgirls can't make dates with customers and visy-versy. I mean, salesmen can't make dates with customers."

"You're quite right, Mr. Bailey," Mr. Ungerman interposed. "But this matter is, ah, shall we say, beside the point. That sales slip is sixteen years old. I would like to know how Mr. Javelin got it."

"I told you," Javelin said, through bared teeth. "I got it yesterday. "On the thirteenth floor, where I—"

"There is no thirteenth floor in this store."

"So I've been told. Nevertheless . . ." Javelin stopped. The store detective was tapping his forehead and winking.

"You think I'm crazy?" Javelin asked, suddenly sober.

"Well, now, I wouldn't go so far as that, Mr., uh, Javelin. But if I were you, I'd just run along quietly and not cause no more trouble." Bailey beamed at Javelin. "That's a good fella, huh?"

Javelin looked at him then turned slowly and looked at Mr. Ungerman. The floor manager's face was set in firm lines.

"All right," Javelin said. "Give me the sales slip and—"

"Better leave it here," Mr. Bailey said, smiling wolfishly. "Just so we don't have no trouble, eh?"

Javelin turned on his heel and walked out of the office. But he did not leave the store. There was a staircase beside the bank of elevators. He climbed the stairs to the second floor.

It was quite obviously devoted to feminine wearing apparel, but Javelin roamed it from one end to the other, then crossed it back and forth, going down each aisle.

When he finished he climbed to the third floor. He searched every nook, boldly looked at the faces of the salesgirls—and floorwalkers. From the third floor he went to the fourth and on up. Shortly before noon he reached the eighteenth and top floor and discovered that it was devoted entirely to the offices of the store. The general offices.

Grimly, he approached a reception desk. "I'd like to see the owner of the store."

"Mr. Orpington is the owner," the girl behind the desk smiled. "But naturally, you don't want to see him."

"Oh, but I do."

"You have an appointment?"

"No, but I want to see him, just the same."

"You'll have to make an appointment."

"All right, make one."

"You'll have to see Mr. Clemson about that. Mr. Clemson is his private secretary."

"And how do I see him?"

"I'll call Mr. Clemson's assistant, if you insist, but I don't think it'll really do you any good. . . ."

"Call him."

The girl hesitated then picked up the phone. "Mr. Myers." She looked up at Javelin. "What is your name?"

Javelin told her. The girl said into the phone: "Mr. Myers, there's a Mr. Richard Javelin here would like to make an appointment with Mr. Orpington. . . . Yes, Mr. Myers." The girl winced a little, then addressed Javelin. "About what did you want to see Mr. Myers?"

"I don't want to see Myers. I want to see Mr. Orpington. On a personal matter." Then Javelin added hastily, "Of vital importance."

The girl spoke into the phone. "He says it's a matter of vital importance. . . . Very well, sir."

She hung up. "Mr. Myers will see you. Straight down the aisle, Number Three."

JAVELIN nodded thanks and passing the receptionist's desk, walked down a corridor between pine-paneled offices until he came to one with the number "3" painted on it in gold paint.

He opened the door and stepped into a sumptuously furnished office. A bald, shriveled little man sat behind a great mahogany desk.

"You're the man wanted to see Mr. Orpington? About what?"

"A personal matter."

"Could you give me a general idea of what it's about?"

"No," Javelin said, bluntly. "It's personal."

Mr. Myers drummed lean claws upon the polished surface of his desk. "This is very irregular, if you don't mind my saying so. Mr. Orpington *never* sees anyone without an appointment. . . ."

"I was told that his private secretary makes the appointments."

"Mr. Clemson? So he does." Mr. Myers smiled thinly. "But it's my job to, well, sort of screen the calls before . . . what did you say your name was? Javelin. . . ?"

"Yes. Richard Javelin."

"*Richard* Javelin!" Mr. Myers brightened. "You wouldn't by any chance be the noted anthropologist?"

"I'm an anthropologist, yes."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Myers. "I'm glad to make your acquaintance. My hobby is natural science. As a matter of fact, I subscribe to *Current Geography* and I read your article on the Amazonian tribes of the Upper Amazon . a very interesting piece, if I may say so."

"Thank you, Mr. Myers."

Mr. Myers got nimbly to his feet. "Oh, it's a pleasure, Mr. Javelin, a real pleasure, I assure you. I understand, from your article, that you're contemplating another trip up the Amazon, to study the culture of the . . ."

"That's why I'm here."

Myers blinked at Javelin. "Indeed? You want to see Mr. Orpington about your Amazon trip?"

Javelin nodded.

"But Mr. Orpington isn't interested in that sort of thing. I know a great deal about his tastes and—"

"Just the same, could I see him?"

Mr. Myers hesitated, then suddenly came around his desk and stepped to a door leading to an inner office. With his hand on the knob he stopped. "I'd like to talk to you again, Mr. Javelin."

"—After I see Mr. Orpington."

Mr. Myers opened the door and popped into an office twice the size of his own. A white-haired man of over seventy sat slumped in a huge leather chair, behind a tremendous desk.

"Mr. Clemson, this is a friend of mine," Myers said. "He'd like very much to talk to Mr. Orpington about an exploring trip he's going to make, to the Upper Amazon. . . ." He stopped.

A DOOR at the side of Clemsen's office opened and a fierce-eyed old man stepped out. He was probably near eighty, but had the vigor of a man many years younger. He was slightly stooped, but even so, towered well over six feet.

His eagle eyes fixed upon Javelin. "You want to see me about an *exploring* trip?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Orpington," Javelin said, quickly. "Mr. Myers got it a little wrong. I want to see you about a purchase I made here yesterday. . . ."

"What's that?" Orpington roared. "You want to see *me* about something you bought here?"

"A distilling outfit—on the thirteenth floor. . . ."

"You have the nerve to come to me about a trifling purchase? With a complaint department downstairs, a return department and one hundred and forty-seven other departments, you brazen your way ." Orpington's voice did a sudden change. "You say, *on the thirteenth floor?*"

"On the thirteenth floor," Javelin repeated firmly. "A floor that apparently does not exist in this building. Yet—"

"A distilling outfit?" Orpington cut in. He whirled on his private secretary, Clemson. "Do we carry distilling outfits?"

"No, Mr. Orpington," the private secretary said, tonelessly.

"Did we ever carry them?"

A full second passed before the secretary answered. "Yes."

Orpington's eyes were fierce once more as they fixed themselves upon Javelin. "Let me get this straight; you say you bought a distilling outfit here—in my store—yesterday? On the thirteenth floor?"

"That's right. I had a sales slip, but it was taken from me by the store detective. And a Mr. Ungerman."

"Shall I call them up?" Mr. Myers asked.

Old Alf Orpington brushed away the

suggestion. His eyes still remained on Javelin. "Go on!"

"That's about all. Except that the salesclerk made a mistake and used an old sales book. A least that's what the men downstairs claim. Also, she wrote in the wrong date . . . 1932. . . ."

"What day in 1932?"

"October 14th. . . ."

THE light went out of Orpington's fierce eagle eyes. A film seemed to sheath the orbs. And Javelin would have sworn that a shudder ran through the gaunt old body.

Orpington said: "The salesgirl what was her name?"

"Miss Carmichael. As a matter of fact, I, well, I made a date with her and when she didn't show up . . ." He smiled wanly. "I haven't been in Chicago very long. I returned from South America only a short time ago and Miss Carmichael . . ."

"Miss Carmichael," Orpington said in an odd tone. "When you talked to her, was she . . . alone?"

"Not exactly. That's what struck me as odd. There was only one other person on the floor, a floorwalker. . . ."

"His name?"

"I don't know."

"What did he look like?"

"Tall, rather handsome; maybe twenty-eight or thirty. . . ."

"Dark hair?"

"Why, yes. All the time I was buying this distilling outfit, he stood there, watching us . . . me. . . ." Javelin stopped abruptly, for Orpington had suddenly turned away from him and walked back into his office. The door swung shut.

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Javelin. "If this isn't the . . ."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Javelin," said the aged private secretary. "Mr. Orpington isn't feeling very well. . . ."

"Neither am I," retorted Javelin. He whirled on his heel and stalked out of Clemson's office, through Mr. Myers' and down the corridor between the paneled offices.

In Clemson's office, Mr. Myers and Mr. Clemson looked uneasily at one another. Neither said a word. Then the door of Orpington's office was jerked open and the store owner popped out. "That man who was here—"

"He's gone, sir," said Myers.

"Call him back. I want to know how he got to the thirteenth floor—what elevator he took. . . ?"

On the eighteenth floor, Javelin pushed the pearl button for an elevator. The door of No. 12 opened and the familiar freckle-faced operator grinned out at him.

"Going down, sir!"

Javelin stepped into the elevator. The door closed . and Javelin plummeted eighteen floors, to his death.

STORY IN CHICAGO *BULLETIN:*

MAN KILLED IN MYSTERY
DEPARTMENT STORE
ELEVATOR PLUNGE

Chicago, October 14, 1948: Richard Javelin, noted Amazon explorer, today plunged to his death down an elevator shaft in the Bonanza Store. Mystery surrounds the death of Javelin as his death was caused by falling down the shaft of an elevator that has not been in use for 16 years. Odd angle is that the elevator, No. 12, was sealed and locked from public use exactly sixteen years ago today, when it crashed, carrying to death three persons, the youthful elevator operator, Mickey Brown, a salesgirl, Elaine Carmichael and Henry Orpington, son of the Bonanza Store owner, Alfred Orpington, who at the time was learning the business and working in capacity of floorwalker on the thirteenth floor. After his son's death, Alfred Orpington sealed up the elevator and changed the numbering of the thirteenth floor, to fourteen.

How Richard Javelin got into Elevator No. 12 today is being probed by police and store officials. . . .

Open Season on the —Bottoms

BY SNOWDEN T. HERRICK

I HAVE the misfortune to be named Higginbottom. Up to nine weeks ago, I often defended this name as equal in honor, dignity and euphony to any in the land.

It first occured to me to suspect that Higginbottom might not be synonymous with peaches and cream when a news story appeared in a New York evening newspaper. On the front page of its early editions the paper ran a piece under the three-column heading: "Where, Oh Where Have the Ramsbottoms Gone?" In later editions the story was on page 3, under a two-column head: "Ramsbottom Disappearance Mystify Wives, Friends."

The story began, under the byline of the paper's staff humorist: "The Thistlethwaites and Postlethwaites had better look out. Because the Bottoms are disappearing and the Thwaites may be next."

The rest of the story related that a -bottom a week had been vanishing for the past month, according to the Bureau of Missing Persons. Two Ramsbottoms, a Rowbottom and a Winterbottom had been reported missing, at roughly regular intervals, with not a clue as to where they had gone. I consider the so-called humorist's reference to the burdensome nature of their names as sour grapes. His name is Jones.

The story made no lasting impression, except perhaps in the minds of the bereaved families and a few other -bottoms, like myself. The humorist's next piece was an interview with a platypus, and it only made page 7 for two editions.

A month later—that is, this morning—it occurred to the assistant city editor of the New York *Morning Bulletin*, where I work as a reporter, to put in a call to the Bureau of Missing Persons to ask how the -bottoms were making out. What we heard made him yell for a rewrite man, me, and the morgue clippings on everyone named -bottom.

The rewrite man took over the phone connection to the Bureau, the head librarian beefed about asking for clips by the last half of a name, and the editor and I had a conference.

"Listen, Hig," said the assistant city editor, "once a week for nine weeks now somebody whose name ends in -bottom has

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

This was a strange kind of discriminatory scourge!

been reported missing in this town. I'm getting the names and addresses and I want you to talk to the families of all nine and get the details. The morgue is going through the files backwards. And let's not you disappear. I want this story signed Higginbottom."

I took the list from the rewrite man. It had the names and addresses of the vanished nine and the people who had reported them missing, and the dates of the disappearances. It didn't work out to every seven days, but it came close, and it was certainly once a week. By this time the names included three Ramsbottoms, two Winterbottoms, a Winterbotham, two Rowbottoms, and a Higginbottom. The Higginbottom disappearance had been in the papers, but otherwise I'd never heard of my namesake.

I HAD to shake off a slightly eerie feeling before I could start to work on the list. Part of the information I got over the phone, part by foot, and part from the district men. I'm putting it down here in chronological order. Almost every case had no clues and no evidence of motive on the part of the missing men.

When I had everything, I sorted it out and studied it. It gave me the creeps.

No. 1 on the -bottom parade was a Ramsbottom. His wife had already left town and I couldn't get much, but apparently she woke up one morning and he simply wasn't sleeping beside her any more. No clothes were missing and there was nothing unusual in his actions the night before. He was a postman, middle-aged, sober and quiet.

Another Ramsbottom came next. He worked in an export company downtown. He was a bachelor who lived with his mother in an apartment on the west side. A normal guy—thirtyish, went out with girls, was good to his mother, nice job. The elevator boy in his office building swears that Ramsbottom asked for the 17th floor and wasn't in the cage when it reached the floor.

Things started getting funnier now—but not to me. The first Rowbottom left a wife who was still weeping when I saw her. She blamed herself. She had accused him of mental misconduct with a divorcee across the hall. He got sore, slammed the door, and was never seen again, according to the testimony of the doorman and the divorcee. Thirty-two years old, a dentist, well off, lived on the east side.

The Winterbottoms were brothers—the only two of the whole lot who knew each other. Winterbottom No. 1 was a radio actor. He played the role of the snake in the grass in "Portia's Other Husband." He left his fellow-actors at the counter in Whelan's Radio City drug store to go to the back to make a phone call. Exit Mr. Winterbottom. They say the scriptwriters set a new speed record for writing a character out of a soap opera.

HIS brother got his the next week. He was down at his brother's lawyer for advice on the missing Winterbottom's affairs. He sent his name in by the receptionist and was asked to wait. When the girl looked up to have him go in, he was gone. She supplied the nearest thing to a clue. The caller had tripped and nearly fallen as he entered. While talking to her he rubbed his shoulder. This Winterbottom was an advertising solicitor.

A very unusual disappearance followed—a Rowbottom. He worked in a Brooklyn department store. One Sunday he took his two-year-old daughter up in a Ferris wheel at Coney Island. His wife, who was scared of heights, stayed on the ground. When the wheel came down, the child was alone in the car. She didn't know where Daddy had gone. No one had seen him leave the car, nor was his body found on the ground.

The third Ramsbottom was apparently used as a temperance lecture. He worked in the shipyards in the Erie Basin, and according to his custom was proceeding to the subway via the taverns on every corner. About the fourth tavern he disappeared from the bar. Seven guys swore off, the bartender told me, the rest ordered another one, straight.

Winterbotham was the best known of the vanishees. The self-styled "Poet Laureate of Sheridan Square and Seventh Avenue South" and author of the "Mental History of Twentieth-Century Civilization" (which existed only in his own mind), he had faded away on the stairs of his Greenwich Village studio, running from his landlady. She pur-

sued him to his room, to threaten him with eviction for non-payment of rent, but he wasn't there. Her explanation of his disappearance does the poet little credit.

Whatever is responsible for all this is working around to the Higginbottoms. The most recent case was this other Higginbottom. When it came up as a news story, the desk had the decency to assign it to someone else, but I remember it. The point of the story was that the guy disappeared on his wedding night.

According to the bride, he had retired to the bathroom of a midtown hotel to disrobe. For reasons of delicacy, she waited quite a while before pounding on the door. The management had to break it open, to disclose no Higginbottom. The tabloids made much of Higginbottom's extreme lack of motive for pulling a sneak.

As I looked over the notes I'd assembled, it was very clear that I had cause to worry. In fact, it took considerable will power to force myself to write the account of the nine disappearances. I began my lead: "It seems to be open season on the "bottoms."

THAT'S all I know about it. I am sitting here at home, drinking and thinking and typing out the facts.

It's obvious to me that somebody, or something, is collecting -bottoms at the rate of one every week. I've looked and looked for another link between these cases. Absolutely the only connection is the -bottom (however spelled) at the end of each one's name.

I suppose it can be said that this thing has a sense of humor. To rid the world, or at least New York, of -bottoms is a notion that might appeal to one type of mind —perhaps a jealous Smith. Surely there can't be many -bottoms left now.

I can see only three ways out. The whole business might suddenly stop, but it isn't likely to. A Higginbottom may be skipped while it works down the list of Bottoms, Bottomes and Bottomleys. Or it may start on the -skys. There's a really funny ending for you.

Just as sure as my name is Higginbottom, I'm next in line to vanish. But the tenth week isn't over.

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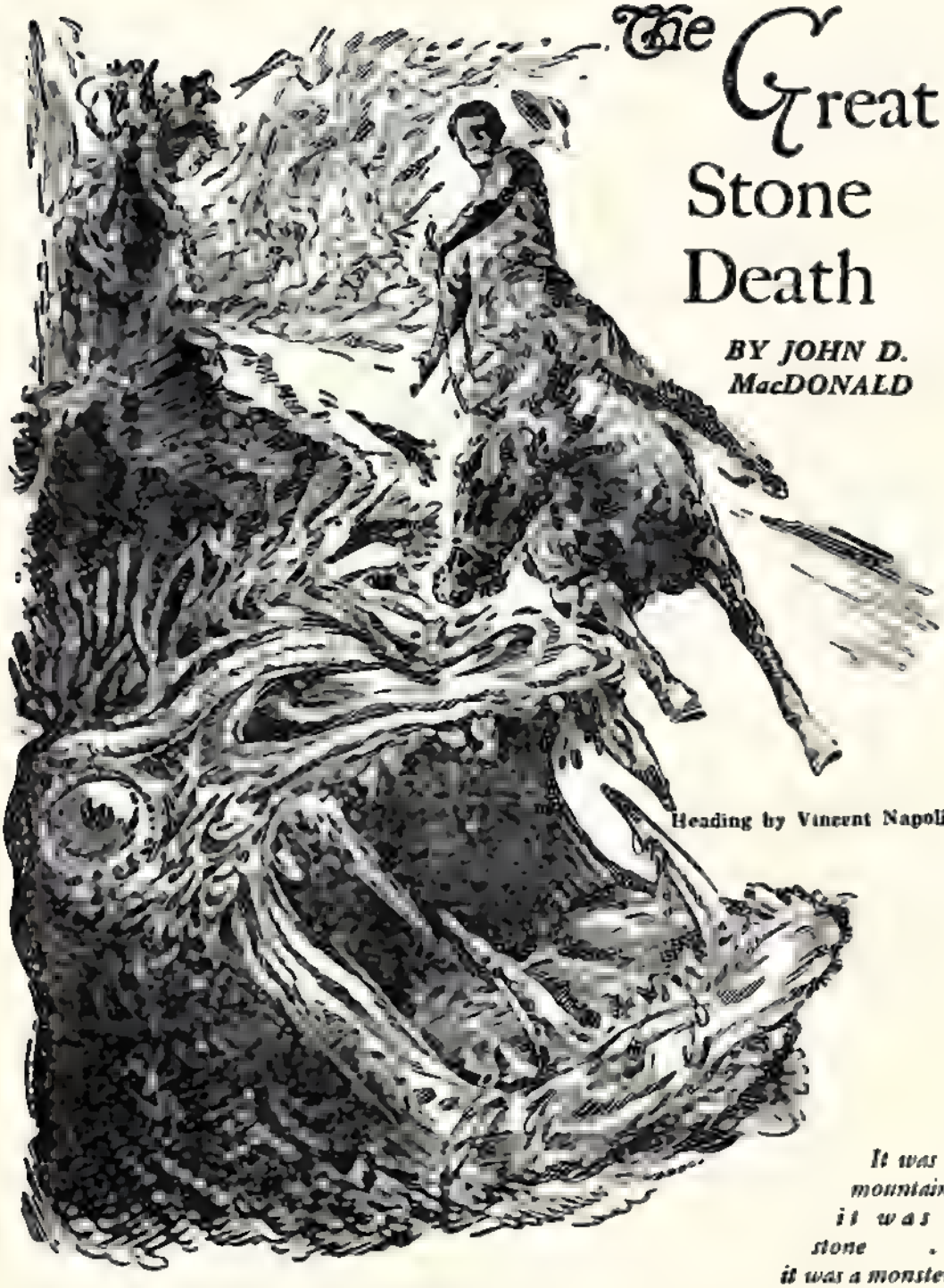
The Great Stone Death

BY JOHN D. MacDONALD



Heading by Vincent Napoli

It was a mountain, it was a stone . . . it was a monster!

ONCE the horse turned its head around and John Logan got a glimpse of black rubbery lips lifted away from strong yellow-white teeth. The teeth clopped together close to his leg and, in panic, he yanked hard on the reins, dug in with the spurs.

The arched back was like an enormous steel spring. He whirled dizzily, fell heavily on his shoulder and hip. He was looking up

at the deep blue of the sky through a wild plum hedge loaded with fruit. He got to his feet, heard Steve Fowler's distant yell, saw the recapture of his horse.

John Logan had hoped that the horse wouldn't be recaptured. It was Steve's idea that they take the trail up into the massive wilderness of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains so that Logan could "learn the country."

He had no desire to learn the country. The air-conditioned bar down in the hotel in the valley suited him perfectly. He wanted nothing to do with horses, campfires or the out-of-doors.

But Steve had been insistent. The insides of his thighs were sore after only a few hours slow riding.

Steve came back down the trail leading the renegade horse. He was grinning broadly.

"Didn't hurt you none, Johnny?" he asked.

"The damn thing tried to bite me," John said petulantly.

"Hell, he was just a-playing. But you shouldn't ought to dug them spurs into him. They're just there so you can threaten him a little. He ain't a bad pony, you treat him right. But don't let him know that maybe he can get to be boss. Now get up on him and teach him some manners."

"All horses are stupid."

"They just like children, Johnny. Come on."

He swung up into the saddle. The horse was very docile. John Logan grinned crookedly. He thought: Just waiting for another chance. The same as this damn country. Unfriendly. Evil. Deadly.

He sighed. Steve had started again. Fat chance of making anyone like Steve understand the cruelty and menace of the mountains. No imagination. Man was a soft animal. Man belonged down in the cities where he could protect himself. Anybody who trusted his flesh and bones to the mountains was kidding himself.

Burro and rabbit brush rubbed against the stirrups. As they climbed even higher toward the misted blue of the mountains, the air became aromatic with the thin, clear touch of sage.

Steve reined in and, when John Logan urged his horse up beside Steve's, the leather-tough man said, "Them over there are Rocky Mountain Red Cedar. That stuff is juniper. The dark trees is pinon. Pine to you, Johnny. Smell how the air gets thinner. Pretty, ain't it?"

Steve went on ahead after John had agreed grumpily. He thought: Might as well humor the man. He's been reading too many Western stories. Thinks he likes this stuff. Makes me uneasy to look at a landscape and see no sign of man. Ought to be signs. Roads. Buildings. Ice-cold soft drinks.

A deep arroyo was marked by a line of huge cottonwoods, and in the foreground a stand of September squaw corn, the stalks stunted, the ears bulging. And ahead rose a towering wall of pines.

The dim trail wound into the cool blue shadows of the forest, out of the warm golden sunshine. A wild turkey disappeared into the red-bronze of the scrub oak underfoot. The shaggy pines stood tall and silent, squirrels chattering on the high limbs.

THE horses began to heave as the trail narrowed and steepened. Steve stopped frequently to rest them and John Logan was glad of the chance to rest himself. The air in the pine forest was cool, and he seemed to sense an air of waiting, as though some grim spirit crouched back in the blue shadows and silently watched their progress with enigmatic smile. John Logan shivered and wondered why Steve Fowler seemed so untouched by the atmosphere of the place.

John Logan thought of Druid rites, of gnarled and evil wood spirits. His palms began to sweat in spite of the cool of the forest. He felt the spell of the ancient and the unknown.

They came to a cañon and, looking over the steep edge, saw the roaring stream dashing itself to snowlike whiteness against the rounded boulders. Steve dismounted and they led the horses cautiously down to an open glade where the stream made a perfect curve.

The sunlight shone in the glade, but it was a watered yellow, devoid of warmth. John shivered and when Steve built the fire he moved gratefully close to it.

"Tired, are you?" Steve asked. John nodded. "This ought to be far enough for

today. I'll get the saddles off the beasts and you fix spots for the bedrolls. Find hollows and fill them with pine boughs. Spread 'em upside-down and get the fluffiest-lookin' ones. No call to hopple the horses in this spot. They won't climb out."

John Logan's body was filled with an aching weariness. Steve whistled as he worked. As dusk came, the tall pines at the top of the ledge seemed to grow even taller, and the blue shadows under them turned to velvet black.

STEVE cooked and John was almost too weary to eat. They sat by the fire and it was night. The stream roared around them and something far back in the pine forest seemed to be laughing at them, slyly.

"You'll get to like this country," Steve said.

John smiled grimly in the darkness. "I hardly think so."

"What brought you out here, anyhow?"

"Lungs. Had to come out here."

"Bad?"

"Bad enough so I'll have to stay out here the rest of my life."

Steve clucked sympathetically. "Well, I couldn't nohow stand seeing anybody sit around down there and look up at the mountains with that kind of sneering look you got. I feel like I own these mountains and like I got to show people what they're like."

"I appreciate your interest," John said politely.

"Maybe I ought to do guiding."

They were quiet for a little time. Steve tossed a chunk on the fire and the sparks fled upward.

"There's something cruel about these mountains," John said softly.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, they're so big. Mankind hasn't made a scratch on them. There are thousands of square miles that have never been seen by man. Actually they are the same as they were back in the dawn of history. Who knows what you might run across up in these hills."

Steve chuckled. "The great stone lizard, maybe?"

"What's that?"

"Oh, foolish Indian talk. Their old men talk about some great stone lizard that lives up above the timberline. Been up here for centuries, the way they tell it."

"It could be," John said softly.

"Hell, man! You beginning to sound like the Indians. This here is rugged country, but it ain't spooky."

"It seems that way to me."

"That's like I was telling you. It seems that way to you because you don't understand it."

"I feel as though I understand things about it that you can't see, Steve. You've been here all your life. Maybe you've been too close to it. It seems primeval to me. As though there was something in it that is full of implacable, stolid evil. Something that waits and watches and waits some more."

"Man, you could almost give *me* the horrors with that talk. What did you used to do? Write ghost stories?"

"I worked in a stock and bond house in New York."

"Maybe you should have writ ghost stories, Johnny. You let your mind run away with you! There's bear up here, but they're timid. Big cats sometimes, but they stay out of the way. Snakes in the rocks, but not up above timberline. 'Course, the floods can get you if you get careless about the arroyos, and sometimes they's a big rock slide, but nothing evil like you say."

"It's something in the atmosphere."

"I was in New York once, Johnny. I stood on Times Square and got shoved around by a couple million people all hurrying off someplace. I didn't know where they were going or what they were going so fast for. Raised hell with me, you know? Give me the shudders. They all had that tight look on their faces. Had to go back to the hotel and I felt like hiding under the bed. Same thing as you up here, Johnny. You ain't used to it, that's all."

John Logan saw the native wisdom of his words. "Guess you're right, Steve." He yawned.

But a half hour later he looked up at the unwinking stars and the roar of the stream seemed to be whispering something to him in hoarse, damp words. Words he couldn't quite understand. He huddled down deeper in the bedroll and licked dry lips. Far off in the pine forest something screamed in distant, futile horror. The sounds sent feathers

of ice crawling up his spine. Deadly is the long night.

In his dreams he was pursued by the great stone lizard. He awoke bathed in icy sweat and it took a long time to go back to sleep.

IN THE morning his fears were nearly gone. They were tucked back in some cold chamber of his mind. The coffee had a wonderful smell and the water of the stream was an icy shock that awakened him completely. He was still stiff and sore, but not as much as he had expected. The horse didn't seem as unfriendly and, when he mounted after leading it up the narrow cut in the face of the ledge, he even slapped it on the shoulder in a friendly fashion and said, "Good morning, you miserable beast."

Steve rode on ahead, and it was a good two hours before John Logan noticed that the huge pines were beginning to thin out. Slowly the mood of the day before crept over him. Even a line of aspens, flaming with the touch of the first high frost, did nothing to cheer him.

The trees thinned, became gnarled dwarfs, spurring his imagination. They huddled against the rocks, clinging with rheumatic limbs to the cruel stone, huddled as though convulsed with secret laughter. Their reaching limbs were twisted arms, bearing gnarled fingers. It seemed as though they pointed at the two riders and carried on a hushed and furtive conversation about the foolish visitors from the world below.

Lichens and mosses scabbed the rocks. The frost-cracked boulders shaded patches of fresh snow, and also the veined fatty gray of last year's ice. The horses panting in the high, thin air labored over a rocky rise and John Logan gasped.

Ahead, stretching up and up was an unbroken expanse of jumbled harsh rock and, almost overhead, was the snow-capped peak of the mountain.

"Pretty?" Steve asked.

"It's . . . breathtaking, Steve."

"This is timberline, Johnny. Now we ride parallel to timberline along this here shoulder of the mountain and maybe we find a better place to go a little higher so we can look back down across the country. Ought to see a hundred miles on a day like this here."

A moving speck disappeared high among the rocks.

"What's that?" John asked.

"Mountain goat, I guess. Maybe we can get a shot at one. You know how to handle that carbon you got there?"

"Yes. I looked it over before we started." He grinned. "I look the part even if I don't act it."

The going was very difficult and, in spite of the frigidity of the air John Logan found that he was sweating. The horses were cautious, afraid of the loose rocks. The timberline was on their left.

They came to a deep gash down the face of the mountain. It was about forty feet deep, but only five feet wide. Steve looked it over. Johnny pulled up beside him.

"How do we cross that?"

"Guess we jump it. I was just looking at that far side there. Might be slippery. Hate to have this critter stop sudden and pop me down that there cut."

John saw what he meant. The near side of the cut was rough, but reasonably level. The far side was smooth, and gray-green with moss. The smooth area, gently rounded, was an oval about sixty feet long and thirty feet wide. Two humps of rock, twenty feet apart, parallel to the cut, jutted up out of the smooth, greenish oval about forty feet beyond the far edge.

"I can make it okay," Steve said, "but I don't want you trying it. I get over there and I can see some place where you can circle around to me. "Okay?"

"Fine," John said.

He edged his horse over to one side. Steve rode back the way they had come, spun the horse around. It was then that John Logan noticed the utter stillness. It was too quiet. In the forest there had been small, murmuring noises, frequent rustlings. Up here on the rocks there was the stillness of the tomb. He could hear each pebble displaced by the nervous hooves of Steve's horse.

His increasing fear of the landscape rapidly turned to a crescendo. He realized that he was trembling. Cold sweat ran down his ribs.

He wanted to call out, to tell Steve not to try the jump, but he was afraid Steve would think him foolish. The whole high, cruel world of rock and pale sunlight

seemed to gather obscene force, to pause, tight and malevolent.

Steve clucked to the horse, lifted it into a gallop toward the edge of the deep cut. His brown face was intent, his eyes narrowed as he clattered by John Logan.

As he neared the cut, John Logan felt the screen bubbling up in his throat, felt his nails biting into his palms.

The red-brown horse arced up.

The far side of the cut, the mossed oval, smooth surfaced, tilted up with reptile speed, tilted up away from the gap while horse and rider were in midair. John heard the scream, but it came from Steve's throat.

Horse and rider fell sprawling down into a red, wet cavity that was lined with sharp, yellow-brown fringes of rock. The great upper jaw shut with a thick, wet chomp that shook the solid rock.

In the second before his horse reared and screamed, John Logan saw that the two knobs of rock he had noticed were in truth eyes. Great, blooded pupils stared at him with massive indifference, and, as his horse wheeled away, he saw the crusted lids slide slowly up, turning the bulging eyes back to two knobs of stone.

The horse fled at suicide pace across the shattered rock. The flight lasted for ten seconds before a foreleg was jammed down into a crack, the bone splitting cleanly as John Logan was catapulted into blackness.

HE SWAM slowly back to consciousness. His cheek was against the rock and blood was crusted across his lips. He vomited from shock, then painfully got up onto his knees. There seemed to be no broken bones.

His wristwatch was shattered. The sun had changed, and he judged that it was mid-afternoon. He stood up, reeled and fell, stood up again. The horse was fifteen feet away. Dead. The head of the animal was at an odd angle.

He stood very still and listened. No sound broke the silence. The clear air daggered his throat and lungs. The horse lay on its left side. He pulled the carbine clear of the boot, slammed a shell into the chamber and walked drunkenly back toward the cut where Steve Fowler had jumped into the red mouth of death.

John heard a hoarse voice in his ears, found that with blood-caked lips he was saying, "The stone lizard. The stone lizard."

His mind had retreated so that it seemed he was watching himself go through motions that should have been impossible because of his fear.

He stood, swaying, ten feet from where Steve had jumped into nothingness. He wondered why they hadn't seen the telltale shape of it. The rounded oval of the head, caked with green moss. The eyes that bulged. The long back, ridged with rock, the obese bulging sides, the stumps of legs buried in the loose rock.

It was like a mirage. At one moment he could see, clear and evident, the shape of horror—and the next moment it would be indistinguishable from the rest of the landscape. Mosses grew on it. Last year's ice was runneled down a fold in the rock of its flank.

He remembered Steve's clear eyes and his smile and he stood in the desolate stillness and cursed the monster, cursing with a fury that made saliva run down his chin.

Kneeling then, he took aim at one of the rock knobs. He took aim at the film of thin rock he had seen slide slowly up to cover the blood-red left eye.

He tightened slowly on the trigger. The slug smacked dead center and he heard the thin, high whine of the ricochet. He squinted at the place where the slug had hit. It seemed to have scabbed off some of the rock, left a cleaner place where the rock was raw.

All fear had left him and his hands were slow and steady. Aiming at the paler spot on the incredible eyelid, he fired again. Once again the ricochet, but the movable film was pocked a bit deeper.

His teeth sank painfully into the inside of his underlip as he fired again. A splinter of rock buzzed close to him.

The fourth shot did not ricochet. He knelt, his fingers white on the stock, saw the black hole in the rock, saw the viscous fluid jet from the hole, running down the eyelid film like melted tar, mixed with blood.

Motionless he crouched, saw the quiver that shook the mound of rock, heard the clatter as fragments of rock scabbed off,

rolled down the sides of the bulging belly. The far edge lifted, but not so far as when Steve had jumped. A gout of rank, nauseating air billowed around him, air with a taint of sulphur and a hint of rot.

The great rock lizard heaved slowly up, and for a moment the huge head swung from side to side as the remaining eye opened. He was waiting for that. Quickly he lifted the gun, pumping the slug deep into the center of the blood-red pupil.

The rock five feet from him was torn away with a great rasp as the gigantic clawed foot struck at him. He rolled violently to one side, scrambled to his feet and backed wearily away.

The rock cracked and groaned as the great bulk heaved itself up over the edge, and he turned and ran. But it ignored him. The great jaws clomping, the rock-horned tail writhing, it moved with ponderous haste diagonally across the slope, passing so near him that he saw the rock-ripple of its flanks. It became more visible to him for what it was as it lumbered away.

Blindly it rammed head on into a towering overhang of rock a quarter-mile away, scrabbling with the claws that could rend solid rock. The overhang was a good three hundred feet high. As John Logan watched, the rock wall wavered, then fell in slow, graceful majesty, millions of tons of solid rock, smashing down on the creature, the great rock slide rolling it over, hammering it down. He got a glimpse of it being flipped like a child's toy, then it disappeared in the thundering river of rock, buried for all time.

A few remaining rocks crashed directly down among the timbers and the dust of the crushed stone lingered in the air. All was stillness.

THE carbine clattered at his feet and he sank down, his head cradled in his arms, the sobs shaking him.

Just as the sun touched the bitter edge of the next mountain, he stood up, picked up the carbine and walked down toward the dark forest of pine.

As he walked, he carried his head high.

Once a man has met, and conquered, the final, unbelievable obscenity, the last lurking god of horror, throwback to ancient days when the world was young, there can be no more fear—ever again.

The darkness of the forest was a friendly Great.

A Curse

By PAGE COOPER

WHEN the last black, vampire hour of night
Sucks at the throat of the dying moon,
Or the brask sun scorches with avid light
The tremulous, fevered flesh of noon,
Through ice or blizzard or bitter hiss
Of rain, you'll seek for the love you slew,
Parched with lust for a phantom kiss,
Faint for the joy you never knew.

Lover in Scarlet

BY HAROLD LAWLOR

The most passionate lover of all. . . .

AFTERWARD the members of the coroner's jury never blamed the shutter, for they couldn't blame something of which they'd never heard. Such a prosaic object, a shutter, to give rise to the dread of that Other. But then the jury never knew, either, of the thing in the scarlet cloak.

Yet that was how it began, with the shutter that thudded in the night's rising wind against the narrow brownstone front of the decrepit old four-story house.

Thump, thump, thump, thump. . . .

The old man lying in the black walnut bed listened and roused and pushed himself up on one scrawny elbow to clutch his nephew with his free hand, a hand more like a liver-spotted claw now than ever.

"Sh! Did you hear?" whispered Uncle Ralph. "Footsteps!"

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

Fred Kolbey listened to the monotonous thudding of the shutter. He was about to reassure the old man of the true origin of the sound when he bethought himself of his recent interview with the doctor.

"I have good news for you, my boy!" the doctor had said, once safely out of earshot of the sick man. "Your uncle's heart is responding splendidly to treatment. There's no reason why he should not go on living for years, barring accidents. Just keep him in a reasonably cheerful frame of mind, and be careful to guard him from sudden shocks."

Good news, Fred had thought sardonically, though he'd diplomatically dissembled his chagrin as best he could. Uncle Ralph would go on living, sitting on his money like a hen on an egg, too stingy to enjoy it or even let anyone else enjoy it.

Fred had felt the gall churn within him. Three weeks he'd wasted in this hell-hole already. Years now, probably, before he could ever expect to get his hands on any of the money. Of all the dirty rotten deals!

THE thudding shutter, his uncle's words, cut across his frustrated brooding now, and as quickly as that the idea was born. It just came to him from nowhere. It had happened before. Hunches. He got 'em, he played 'em, he always won. Didn't they call him Lucky Kolbey out at the track, in the back room at Shenley's?

"Footsteps, Uncle Ralph?" Fred said now, aloud. He appeared to listen. "Yes, someone is coming up the stairs." He let his eyes widen then, let them turn to meet the still wider eyes of the old man on the bed. "But there is no one in the house except us!"

Uncle Ralph whimpered. "It's someone coming after my money. Or—or it's someone coming after *me*!"

"Nonsense!" Fred cried, with what he hoped would sound like false heartiness. "I know what you're thinking, Uncle Ralph! You're thinking it's *Death* coming for you!"

The aged man gasped, and fell back against the pillows, his open mouth like a purse from which the drawstring had been removed.

Fred patted the brown claw nearest him, watched with satisfaction the labored heaving of the thin chest under the sheet. "There, there, I'll go see who it is." He paused to add reflectively, "*what* it is."

Uncle Ralph groaned, the color of his skin like a faint wash of gray over ocher.

Fred had a thin smile for the darkened hall outside his uncle's bedroom. Keep him in a cheerful frame of mind, eh? Why hadn't he thought of this before? What could be easier than playing on the sick imagination of a man already at death's threshold? Once the ball was rolling it shouldn't take so very long.

Fred listened, and nodded approvingly. Already luck was with him, he noted, for the wind died just then, and the thudding of the shutter muted until it died away at last into silence. He waited a moment before reentering the bedroom.

Again his uncle had propped himself on one elbow, the better to watch with rheumy, apprehensive eyes for what might come through the door. When he saw it was only Fred, he groaned gratefully, and asked in a racked whisper, "What—what was it?"

Fred let his forehead furrow. "I thought I saw— But, pshaw! Of course I didn't!"

"What? What?" The swollen tongue came out, tried futilely to moisten dry lips.

"I must have imagined it. Calm yourself, Uncle Ralph! Don't you think I'd tell you, if I were sure I—"

"No!" The rheumy eyes narrowed cunningly. "You wouldn't tell me. You'd let me lie here, unknowing, and let it get me!"

"Uncle Ralph!" Fred sounded unbearably hurt. "Very well, then, I thought I saw something flee down the stairs when it heard me. Something in a scarlet cloak. I caught the white flash of—of bones, and there was a scarlet cowl that only partially hid a—a *skull!*"

The old man made a mewling piteous sound; and plucked feebly at the bedclothes.

Fred laughed unconvincingly. "But of course I must have been mistaken! You lie here quietly now, while I go down to my room and finish up some work I must do."

"Don't leave me here all alone!"

"There's nothing to hurt you, and I'll be right below this room. You have your bell there on the table, and I'll hear you if you ring, or if you call me," Fred said, and

hurried out, purposely deaf to the frantic entreaties that followed him.

He must get away before the shutter started banging again. Better to leave the old man to his frightened thoughts, leave him to meet alone the renewed sound of the 'footsteps'.

Fred started down the stairs, praying to such gods as he acknowledged for the rising of the wind. Such was the power of the imagination, he thought in some amusement, that he even felt a little uneasy himself. True, he didn't hear footsteps that weren't there! Nuts to that! But damned if it didn't seem as if *eyes* were following his progress down the stairs! He felt this so sharply that he grew conscious of a chilly sensation in the small of his back.

Once in the quiet of his own room he forgot readily enough that queerly disturbing moment on the stairs. He listened instead, achingly, for the coming of the wind. And when it came, he mused, what should he do when next he was called to that room above? What should he say? Surely his own imagination was capable of depicting a yet more vivid horror, more graphic still, for the delectation of Uncle Ralph?

He listened. The wind was rising! The window rattled, and tree branches scratched the outer walls. And then it came.

Thump, thump, thump, thump. . .

Immediately Uncle Ralph's bell began to jangle fiercely. Fred grinned, and lolled at his ease, hands clasped behind his head. Let the old boy stew in his own juice yet awhile.

"Fred! Fred! Fred!"

Fred cocked his head. He could hear a muttering now, coming faintly down the stairs. An unintelligible jargon. Good! Uncle Ralph was gibbering to himself. It was several moments before a faint wail came again for Fred.

HE ROSE at last and started leisurely up the stairs, but near the top he broke into a run. "Uncle Ralph, what is it? I was in the bathroom, and—"

He stopped on the threshold of the bedroom. His uncle had managed somehow to get out of bed alone, to walk or crawl or drag himself halfway to the door before collapsing where he lay on the floor. Fred hastened to him, lifted the stertorously breathing body, slapped the putty-colored face until the faded blue eyes opened to stare blindly, already lost in a semi-coma.

"Go, Fred!" His uncle panted. The voice came so faintly Fred had to bend an ear nearly to the gray lips. "Money in box—under bed. But don't wait, go! *It* was here! The thing—in scarlet! It loves you! It told me so! It wants me to die so it—can be alone—with you!"

The thin body shuddered as if from a racing motor within. Then it was still. Fred stared down, unbelieving. It couldn't have happened so quickly! He couldn't have succeeded so well! Uncle Ralph couldn't be dead! And then he smiled, remembering, before easing the body to the floor.

Lucky Kolbey!

He went to the bed then, stooped, lifted its damask draperies to pull the carved walnut chest from beneath it. He turned the key already in the lock, and eagerly threw back the lid. Currency! Bundles of it, bales of it! More than he'd ever dreamed!

He was still bending over the opened chest, gloating, when he felt again that uncomfortable sensation in the small of his back. He turned inquiringly, more in annoyance than fright. Shocked unbelief held him still momentarily. It *wasn't* there? It *couldn't* be there? He was leaping to his feet then, his eyes swivelling frantically.

But there was nowhere to flee, no way he could escape the thing in the doorway. The thing in the hooded cloak with its death's-head under the cowl of scarlet, its jaws clicking ingratiatingly, its eyeless sockets giving off an unholy light of what passed with it for love. Advancing toward Fred, it extended the chalk-white bones that were its arms.

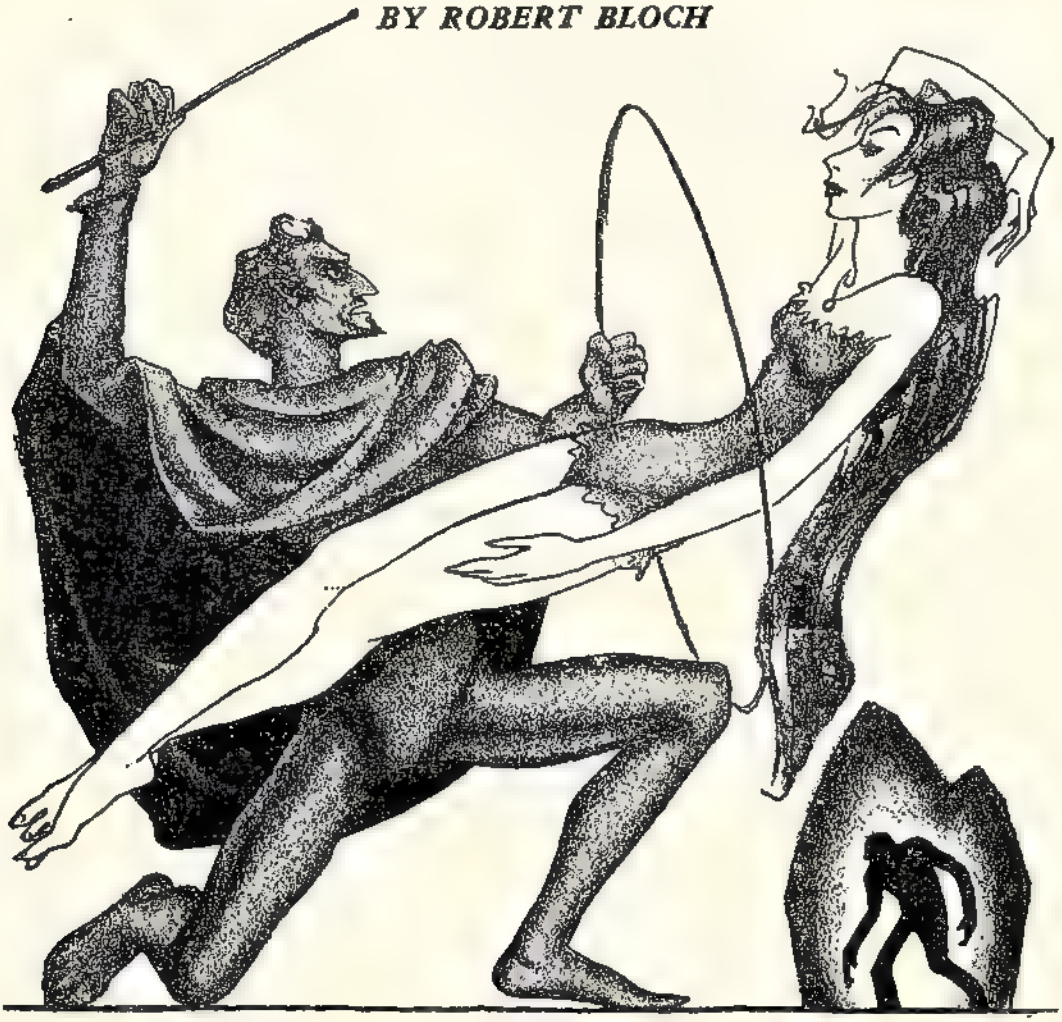
It was happy, Fred's dazed mind recognized sickly. It had received its wish. It was *alone* with him at last!

"Sweetheart!" it grated in a hideous travesty of a voice.

He had time only to make a dreadful sound low in his throat before he felt the bony arms enfold him, before merciful oblivion came to him, borne on the swift wings of horror.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

BY ROBERT BLOCH



He was more than just a magician; he had the Power

I WISH you would turn off the lights. They hurt my eyes. You don't need the lights. I'll tell you anything you want to know. I'll tell you all about it, everything.

But turn off the lights.

And please don't stare at me.. How can a man think, with all of you crowding around and asking questions, questions, questions—

All right, I'll be calm. I'll be very calm. I didn't mean to shout. It is not like me to

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

lose my temper. I am a gentle man. You know I'd never hurt anyone.

Why are you laughing? There is nothing to laugh about. It was all an accident, you know that. I lost the Power.

But you don't know about the Power, do you? You don't know about Sadini and how he sold his soul to Satan for a black gift.

No, I'm not raving. That is the truth, gentlemen. I can prove it. Here, listen to me. I'm going to tell you all about it, from the very beginning. If only you'll turn off the lights—

My name is Hugo. No, just Hugo. That's all they ever called me at the Home. I lived at the Home ever since I can remember, and the Sisters were very kind to me. The other children, they would not play with me because of my back and my squint, but the Sister's were kind. They didn't call me "Crazy Hugo" and make fun of me because I couldn't recite. They didn't get me in the corner and hit me and make me cry.

No, I'm all right. You'll see. I was telling you about the Home, but it's not important. It all started after I ran away.

You see, I was getting too old, the Sisters told me. They wanted me to go with the Doctor to another place, a County place. But Fred—he was one of the boys who didn't hit me—he told me that I mustn't go with the Doctor. He said the County place was bad and the Doctor was bad. They had rooms with bars on the windows in this place, and the Doctor would tie me to a table and cut out my brain. He wanted to operate on my brain, Fred said, and then I would die.

So I could see that the Sisters really thought I was crazy too, and the Doctor was coming for me the very next day. That's why I ran away, sneaking out of my room and over the wall that night.

But you're not interested in what happened after that, are you? I mean, about when I was living under the bridge and selling newspapers and in winter it was so cold—

Sadini? Yes, but that's part of it; the winter and the cold, I mean. Because it was the cold that made me faint in that alley behind the theatre, and that's how Sadini found me.

I remember the snow in the alley and how it came up and hit me in the face, the icy, icy snow just smothering me in cold, and I sank down in it forever.

Then, when I woke up, I was in this warm place inside the theatre, in the dressing-room, and there was an angel looking at me.

I thought she was an angel, anyway. Her hair was long, like golden harp strings, and I reached up to feel it and she smiled.

"Feeling better?" she asked. "Here, drink this."

She gave me something nice and warm to drink. I was lying on a couch and she held my head while I drank.

"How did I get here" I asked. "Am I dead?"

"I thought you were when Victor carried you in. But you'll be all right now, I guess."

"Victor?"

"Victor Sadini. Don't tell me you haven't heard of the Great Sadini?"

I shook my head.

"He's a magician. He's on now. Good heavens, that reminds me, I'll have to change!" She took the cup away and stood up. "You just rest until I get back."

I smiled at her. It was very hard to talk, because everything was going round and round.

"Who are you?" I whispered.

"Isobel."

"Isobel," I said. It was a pretty name. I whispered it over and over again until I went to sleep.

I don't know how long it was until I woke up again—I mean, until I woke up and felt all right. In between times I would be sort of half-awake, and sometimes I could see and hear for a little while.

ONCE I saw a tall man with black hair and a mustache bending over me. He was dressed all in black, too, and he had black eyes. I thought maybe it was the Devil coming to carry me down to Hell. The Sisters used to tell us about the Devil. I was so frightened I just fainted again.

Another time I could hear voices talking, and I opened my eyes again and saw the man in black and Isobel sitting over on the side of the room. I guess they didn't know

I was awake, because they were talking about me.

"How much longer do you think I'm going to put up with this, Vic?" she was saying. "I am sick and tired of playing nursemaid to a lousy tramp. What's the big idea? You don't know him from Adam, anyway."

"But we can't just throw him out in the snow to die, can we?" The man in black was walking up and down, pulling on the ends of his mustache. "Be reasonable, darling. The poor kid's been starving to death, can't you tell? No identification, nothing; he's in trouble and needs help."

"Nuts to that noise! Call the wagon—there's charity hospitals, aren't there? If you expect me to spend all my time between shows cooped up with a mangy—"

I couldn't understand what she meant, what she was saying. She was so beautiful, you see. I knew she must be kind, and it was all a mistake, maybe I was too sick to hear right.

Then I fell asleep again, and when I woke up I felt better, different, and I knew it was a mistake. Because she was there, and she smiled at me again.

"How are you?" she asked. "Ready to eat something now?"

I could only stare at her and smile. She was wearing a long green cloak all covered with silver stars, and now I know she must be an angel for sure.

Then the Devil came in.

"He's conscious, Vic," said Isobel.

The Devil looked at me and grinned.

"Hi, pal! Glad to have you with us. For a day or so there, I didn't think we'd have the pleasure of your company much longer."

I just stared at him.

"What's the matter, my makeup frighten you? That's right, you don't even know who I am, do you? My name's Victor Sadini. The Great Sadini—magic act, you know."

Isobel was smiling at me, too, so I guessed it was all right. I nodded. "My name is Hugo," I whispered. "You saved my life, didn't you?"

"Skip it. Leave the talking till later. Right now, you've got to eat something and get some more rest. You've been camping here on the sofa for three days now, chum. Better get some strength, because the act closes here Wednesday and we jump to Toledo."

On Wednesday the act closed, and we jumped to Toledo. Only we didn't really jump, we took a train. Oh yes, I went along. Because I was Sadini's new assistant.

This was before I knew he was a servant of the Devil. I just thought he was a kind man who had saved my life. He sat there in the dressing-room and explained everything to me; how he grew the mustache and combed his hair that way and wore black just because that's the way stage magicians are supposed to look.

He did tricks for me; wonderful tricks with cards and coins and handkerchiefs that he pulled out of my ears and colored water he poured from my pockets. He could make things vanish too, and I was afraid of him until he told me it was all a trick.

ON THE last day he let me get up and stand behind the stage while he went out in front of the people and did what he called his "act" and then I saw wonderful things.

He made Isobel stretch out on a table and then he waved a wand and she floated up in the air with nothing to hold her. Then he lowered her down and she didn't fall, just smiled while all the people clapped. Then she would hand him things to do tricks with, and he would point his magic wand at them and make them vanish, or explode, or change. He made a big tree grow out of a little plant right before my eyes. And then he put Isobel into a box and some men wheeled out a huge steel blade, with teeth in it, and he said he was going to saw her in half. He tied her down, too.

I almost ran out on the stage then, to stop him, but she wasn't afraid, and the men who pulled the curtains behind the scenes were laughing too, and so I guessed it must be another trick.

But when he turned on the electric current and began to saw into the box I stood there with the sweat popping out all over me because I could see him cutting into her. Only she smiled, even when he sawed right through her. She smiled, and she wasn't dead at all!

THEN he covered her up and took the saw away and waved his magic wand and she jumped up, all in one piece again. It was the most wonderful thing I'd ever heard of, and I guess it was seeing the show that made me decide I'd have to go with him.

So after that I talked to him, about how he'd saved my life and who I was, and not having any place to go, and how I'd work for him for nothing, do anything, if only I could come along. I didn't tell him I wanted to go just so I could see Isobel, because I guessed he wouldn't like that. And I didn't think she'd like it either. She was his wife, I knew that now.

It didn't make much sense, what I told him, but he seemed to understand.

"Maybe you can make yourself useful at that," he said. "We have to have someone to look after the props, and it would save time for me. Besides, you could set them up and pack them again."

"Ixnay," said Isobel. "Utsnay." I didn't understand her, but Sadini did. Maybe it was magic talk.

"Hugo's going to be all right," he said. "I need somebody, Isobel. Somebody I can really depend on—if you know what I mean."

"Listen, you cheap ham—"

"Take it easy, Isobel." She was scowling, but when he looked at her she just sort of wilted and tried to smile.

"All right, Vic. Whatever you say. But remember, it's your headache, not mine."

"Right." Sadini came over to me. "You can come along," he said. "From now on you're my assistant."

That's how it was.

That's how it was for a long, long time. We went to Toledo, and to Detroit and Indianapolis and Chicago and Milwaukee and St. Paul—oh, a lot of places. But they were all alike to me. We would ride on a train and then Sadini and Isobel would go to a hotel and I would stay behind and watch them unload the baggage car. I would get the trunks filled with props (that's what Sadini called the things he used in his act) and hand a slip of paper to a truck driver. We would go to the theatre then, and the truck driver took the props into the alley where I'd haul them up to the dressing-room and backstage. Then I unloaded props and that's how it went.

I slept in the theatre, in the dressing-room most of the time, and I'd eat with Sadini and Isobel. Not often with Isobel, though. She liked to sleep late at the hotel, and I guess she was ashamed of me at first. I didn't blame her, the way I looked, with my clothes and my eyes and back.

Of course Sadini bought me new clothes after a while. He was good to me, Sadini was. He talked a lot about his tricks and his act, and he even talked about Isobel. I didn't understand how such a nice man could say such things about her.

Even though she didn't seem to like me, and kept away from Sadini too, I knew she was an angel. She was beautiful the way the angels were in the books the Sisters showed me. Of course, Isobel wouldn't be interested in ugly people like myself or Sadini, with his black eyes and his black mustache. I don't know why she ever married him in the first place when she could find handsome men like George Wallace.

She saw George Wallace all the time, because he had another act in the same show we traveled with. He was tall, and he had blonde hair and blue eyes, and he was a singer and dancer in the show. Isobel used to stand in the wings (that's the part on the side of the stage) when he was singing, and look at him. Sometimes they would talk together and laugh, and once when Isobel said she was going to the hotel because she had a headache, I saw her and George Wallace walk into his dressing-room.

MAYBE I shouldn't have told Sadini about that, but it just came out before I could stop it. He got very angry, and he asked me questions, and then he told me to keep my mouth shut and my eyes open.

It was wrong for me to say yes, I know that now; but all I could think of then was that Sadini had been kind to me. So I watched Isobel and George Wallace, and one day when Sadini was downtown between shows, I saw them again in Wallace's dressing-room. It was on the balcony, and I tiptoed up to the door and looked through the keyhole. Nobody else was around, and nobody could see me blushing.

Because Isobel was kissing George Wallace and he was saying, "Come on, darling—let's not stall any longer. When the show closes, it's you and me. We'll blow out of here together, head for the coast and—"

"Quit talking like a schmoe!" Isobel sounded mad. "I'm nuts about you, Georgie-boy, but I know a good deal when I see it. Vic's a headliner; he'll be pulling in his grand a week when you're doing a single for smokers. Fun's fun, but there's no percentage in such a deal for me."

"Vic!" George Wallace made a face. "What's that phony got, anyway? A couple of trunks full of props and a mustache. Anybody can do a magic act—I could myself, if I had the stake for the gimmicks. Why, hell, you know all his routines. You and I could build our own act, baby. How's that for any angle? The Great Wallace and Company—"

"Georgie!"

She said it so fast and she moved so fast, I didn't have time to get away. Isobel walked right over to the door and yanked it open, and there I was.

"What the—"

George Wallace came up behind her and when he saw me he started to reach out, but she slapped his hands down.

"Can it!" she said. "I'll handle this." Then she smiled at me, and I knew she wasn't angry. "Come on downstairs, Hugo," she said. "Let's you and I have a little talk."

I'll never forget that little talk.

WE SAT there in the dressing-room, just Isobel and me, all alone. And she held my hand—she had such soft, sweet hands—and looked into my eyes, and talked with her low voice that was like singing and stars and sunshine.

"So you found out," she said. "And that means I'll have to tell you the rest. I—I didn't want you to know, Hugo. Not ever. But now I'm afraid there's no other way."

I nodded. I didn't trust myself to look at her, so I just stared at the dressing-table. Sadini's wand was lying there—his long black wand with the golden tip. It glittered and shone and dazzled my eyes.

"Yes, it's true, Hugo. George Wallace and I are in love. He wants me to go away."

"B-but Sadini is such a nice man," I told her. "Even if he does look that way."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, when I first saw him, I thought he was the Devil, but now—"

She sort of caught her breath. "You thought he looked like the Devil, Hugo?"

I laughed. "Yes. You know, the Sisters, they said I wasn't very bright. And they wanted to operate on my head because I couldn't understand things. But I'm all right. You know that. I just thought Sadini might be the Devil until he told me everything was a trick. It wasn't really a magic wand and he didn't really saw you in half—"

"And you believed him!"

I LOOKED at her now. She was sitting up straight, and her eyes were shining. "Oh, Hugo, if I'd only known! You see, I was the same way, once. When I first met him, I trusted him. And now I'm his slave. That's why I can't run away, because I'm his slave. Just as he is the slave of—the Devil."

My eyes must have bugged out, because she kept looking at me funny as she went on.

"You didn't know that, did you? You believed him when he said he just did tricks, and that he sawed me in half on the stage for an illusion, using mirrors."

"But he does use mirrors," I said. "Don't I pack them and unpack them and set them up just so?"

"That's only to fool the stagehands," she said. "If they knew he was really a sorcerer, they'd lock him up. Didn't the Sisters tell you about the Devil and selling your soul?"

"Yes, I have heard stories, but I thought—"

"You believe me, don't you, Hugo?" She took my hand again and looked right at me. "When he takes me out on the stage and raises me from the ground, that's sorcery. One word and I would fall to my death. When he saws me in half, it's real. That's why I can't run away, that's why I'm his slave."

"Then it must have been the Devil who

gave him the magic wand that does the tricks."

She nodded, watching me.

I looked at the wand. It was glittering away, and her hair glittered, and her eyes glittered.

"Why can't I steal the wand?" I asked.

She shook her head. "It wouldn't help. Not as long as he's alive."

"Not as long as he's alive," I repeated.

"But if he were to—oh, Hugo, you must help me! There's only one way, and it wouldn't be a sin, not when he's sold his soul to the Devil. Oh, Hugo, you must help me, you will help me—"

She kissed me.

She *kissed* me. Yes, she put her arms around my back, and her golden hair wound round and round me, and her lips were soft and her eyes were like glory, and she told me what to do, how to do it, and it wouldn't be a sin, he was sold to the Devil, no one would ever know.

So I said yes, I would do it.

She told me how.

And she made me promise never to tell anyone, no matter what happened, even if things went wrong and they asked questions of me.

I promised.

And then I waited. I waited for Sadini to come back that night. I waited until after the show, when everyone went home. Isobel left, and she told Sadini to stay behind and help me pack because I was sick, and he said he would. It all worked just as she promised it would.

We started packing, and there was nobody left in the theatre but the doorman, and he was way downstairs in the room next to the alley. I went out into the hall while Sadini was packing, and saw how dark and still it was. Then I came into the dressing-room again and watched Sadini putting away his props.

He hadn't touched the wand, though. It glittered and glittered, and I wanted to pick it up and feel the magic of the Power the Devil had given him.

BUT there was no time for that, now. Because I had to walk up behind Sadini as he bent over the trunk. I had to take the piece of iron pipe out of my pocket and raise it over his head and bring it down once, twice, three times.

There was an awful cracking sound, and then a thump, when he fell to the floor.

Now all I had to do was lift him into the trunk and—

There was another sound.

Somebody knocked on the door.

Somebody rattled the doorknob as I dragged Sadini's body over to the corner and tried to find a place to hide it. But it was no use. The knocking came again and I heard a voice calling, "Hugo—open up! I know you're there!"

So I opened the door, holding the pipe behind my back. George Wallace came in.

I guess he was drunk. Anyway, he didn't seem to notice Sadini lying on the floor at first. He just looked at me and waved his arms.

"Hugo, I gotta talk t'you." He was drunk all right, I could smell the liquor now. "She told me," he whispered. "She told me what was up. Tried to get me drunk, but I'm wise to her. I sneaked away. Gotta talk t'you before you do 'nything foolish.

"She told me. Gonna frame you, that's what. You kill Sadini, she'll tell the cops, deny everything. You're supposed t'be—well, kinda soft in the head. 'N when you spill that hooey about the Devil they'll figure you're crazy for sure, lock you up. Then she wanted us to run away, take the act. I hadda come back here, warn you before—"

Then he saw Sadini. He just sort of froze up, standing there stiff as a board with his mouth open. That made it easy for me to come up behind him and hit him with the pipe; hit him and hit him and hit him.

Because I knew he lied, he was lying about her, he couldn't have her, he couldn't run away, I wouldn't permit it. I knew what he really wanted—he wanted the wand of Power, the Devil's wand. And it was now all mine.

I walked over and took it up in my hands, felt the Power surging along my arm as I looked at the glittering tip. I was still holding it in my hand when she came in.

She must have followed him, but she was too late now. She could tell, when she saw him lying there on the floor with the back of his head laughing up like a big red mouth.

She was frozen for a moment, too, but

then before I could say anything, Isobel slid to the floor. She just fainted.

I stood there, holding the wand of Power, looking down at her and feeling sorry. Sorry for Sadini, burning in Hell. Sorry for George Wallace because he had come here. Sorry for her, because all the plans had gone wrong.

Then I looked at the wand, and I got this wonderful idea. Sadini was dead, and George was dead, but she still had me. She wasn't afraid of me—she had even kissed me.

And I had the wand. That was the secret of the magic. Now, while she was still asleep, I could find out if it was true. And then when she woke up, what a surprise for her! I would tell her, "You were right, Isobel. It does work. And from now on, you and I will do the act. I have the wand and you need never be afraid again. Because I can do it. I already did it when you were asleep."

THERE was nothing to interfere. I carried her out to the stage. I carried the props, too. I even turned on the spotlight, because I knew where it was. It felt funny, standing there all alone in the empty theatre, bowing into the blackness.

But I was wearing Sadini's cloak, and I stood there for a moment with Isobel lying before me. With the magic wand in my hand I felt like a new person—like Hugo the Great.

And I was Hugo the Great.

That night, in the empty theatre, I was Hugo the Great. I knew just what to do, how to do it. There were no stagehands so I didn't need to bother with the mirrors, and I had to strap her and turn on the electric current myself. The blade didn't seem to turn so fast, either, when I put it right up against the board box covering her, but I made it work.

It buzzed away and buzzed away, and then she opened her eyes and screamed, but I had her strapped down, and besides there was nothing to be afraid of. I showed her the magic wand, but she just screamed and screamed until the buzzing drowned out her voice and the blade came through.

The blade was red. Dripping red.

It made me sick to look at it, so I closed my eyes and waved the magic wand of Power very quickly.

Then I looked down.

Everything was—the same.

I waved the wand again.

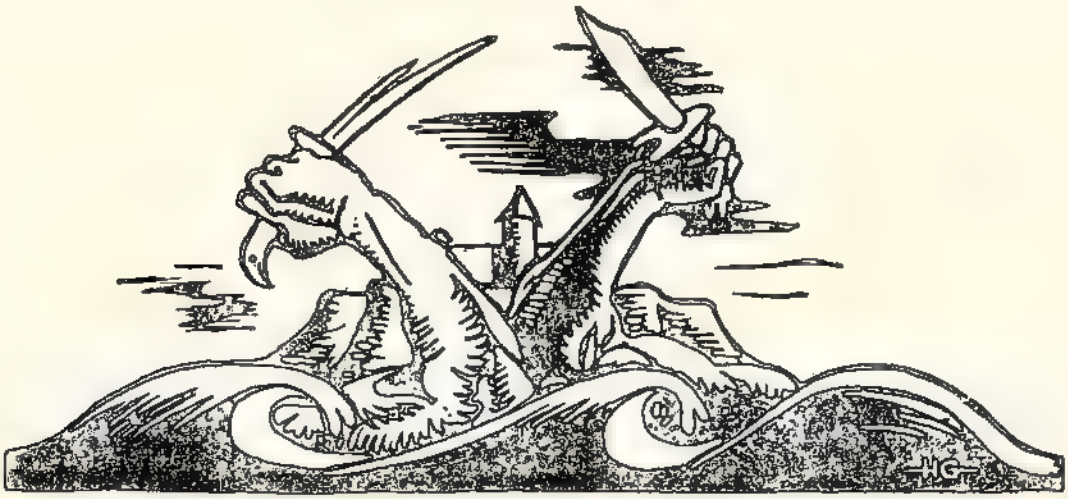
Still nothing happened.

Something had gone wrong.

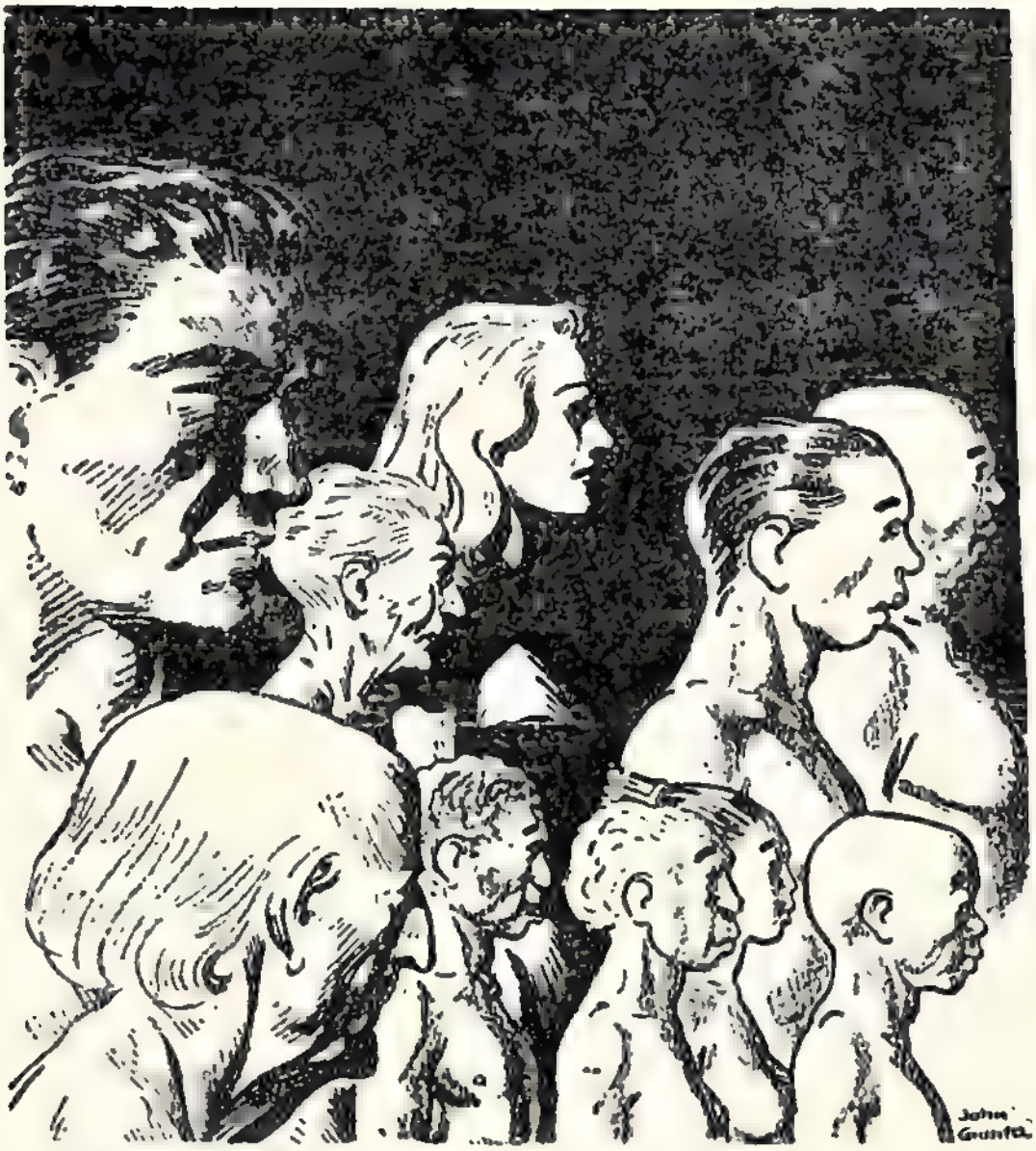
Then I was screaming, and the doorman finally heard and ran in, and then you came and took me away.

So, you see, it was just an accident. The wand didn't work. Maybe the Devil took the power away when Sadini died. I don't know. All I know is that I'm very tired.

Will you turn off the lights now, please? I want to go to sleep. . . .



The Big Shot



Oh, Thou who burn'st in Heart for those who burn
In Hell, whose fires Thyself shall feed in turn;
How long be crying, 'Mercy on them, God!'
Why, who art Thou to teach, and He to learn?

THE horrible nausea passed away and Bull Rafferty's spinning senses gradually slowed down to the point where he could regain command of them. Once more he could see and hear and feel and thus make contact with existence. It was comforting, though he would have been the last to admit it. No man likes to drown in a

By Eric Frank Russell

mental void. There is a loneliness in chaos, a terrible loneliness—not even the touch of a phantom hand.

With a mite of amazement he discovered that his feet still were walking forward, doggedly, with a dumb, animal stubbornness almost as if they had remained totally unaware of the momentary blankness above them, or as if they were entities apart from the squat, powerful body they carried.

There was something mighty peculiar about that. When a guy has a spasm he ought to flop. He shouldn't continue to amble along in a dreamy maze, like a zombie. Bemused by this, Rafferty pondered unseeingly while his legs bore him onward.

Snap out of it, Bull, and think back a bit. You've got to know the score. The boys expect you invariably to know the score—and when you don't they'll say you're getting old and feeble, and your mind's slipping, and somebody ought to do something about it. Think back, Bull, and think hard.

Let me see now: there had been Frankel, white and sweaty, his eyes burning life traffic lights under the brim of his heavy hat. There had been a pomade stain on the front of the hat-band; he could visualize it clearly. And Frankel's thin, hungry face sort of all screwed up with a regular twitch in the lower lid of his right eye. The signs had been easy to read: Frankel was hopped to the gills.

The sight hadn't bothered Bull Rafferty. Getting up from behind his desk he'd walked straight at Frankel, confidently, aggressively, in manner that did justice to his reputation. He had a tigerish self-assertiveness which many a time had paralyzed hopheads tougher than Frankel.

It always worked.

It hadn't worked.

What had gone wrong?

So deep was Rafferty's preoccupation that he lumbered onward like a sleepwalker, his eyes open and seeing but not telling what they saw. It was the little squirt with the white hair who shocked him into wakefulness.

"Pardon me," chipped in the little squirt, coming at him out of nowhere. "I think I've lost myself somehow . . . I don't know how." He was aged, wizened, confused and uneasy. His expression was that of one hoping for the best while half-suspecting the worst. "Can you tell me where I am?"

Rafferty looked him over with open contempt. "You don't know where you are?"

"I'm afraid I don't." The other was apologetic while his air of dreadful suspicion grew deeper. "Do you?"

"Sure," said Rafferty, displaying all his usual confidence. "I'd be in a heck of a fix if I didn't. What d'you take me for—a drunk?" His grin was patronizing as he waved an all-embracing hand, his small, deep-set eyes casually following the wave. "This, you poor stupe, is—" His words cut off abruptly.

"Well?" prompted the other.

"Hell in a bath-tub!" exclaimed Rafferty, his eyes wide and stupified.

HE SAW the marble road for the first time. He was plumb in the middle of it and had walked a goodly part of it, but had not really seen it until this moment. It resembled no highway within one hundred miles of his lifelong stamping-grounds, nor any of which he'd ever heard.

A broad, imposing artery, smooth, glossy, richly veined, it stretched far backward to a ghostly mist behind which loomed the firmament, black and awful. Along it, be-

Doesn't matter how big you are, Brother, there's things bigger!

Heading by John Giunta

tween him and its distant vanishing-point, toiled a scattered, uneven string of pedestrians in ones, twos, threes and random groups of dozens.

Ahead and similarly dotted with walkers, the road continued toward a vague horizon on which a gigantic cluster of buildings glittered in light from no visible sun. Direct and true went the highway without slightest hint of bend or curve. The street called straight.

There was a shimmering, strangely elusive suggestion of mighty, rainbow-hued mountains behind that faraway cluster of spires and pinnacles from which steadily radiated a fan-shaped glow of deepest rose.

Rafferty developed the queerest feelings as he took in this view; it was fantastic, alien, yet frighteningly familiar in some unidentifiable way. He knew every molecule, every atom of it as surely as if he had assembled them with his own hands, yet he had never seen it before in any way he could recall. Desperately he flogged his memory for some forgotten mind-picture.

"Well?" the other repeated. He put it with the nervous urgency of one who cannot bear to wait.

"Look," growled Rafferty evasively, "where's the last place you remember?"

"Alice Springs."

"Never heard of the dump." His small, calculating eyes held a worried glint as they continued to study the unearthly panorama. For the time being he wished this shrivelled old geezer would leave him alone and let him think. This road . . . Frankel . . . *what happened?*

"My name's George Morton," his companion went on. "I jumped from my buggy and I fell flat on my face. I couldn't get up for a while and felt pretty bad. Nobody took any notice, nobody lent me a hand, and that isn't like the folk in Alice Springs." He shook his head in solemn puzzlement, his white hairs drifting around. "When I came to my feet I found myself here. What part of Australia is it? I don't know of any—"

"Australia!" Rafferty echoed. He guffawed with less than his usual heartiness. "You're crazy! Australia is the other side of the earth."

"I see." Morton clasped his hands together, stared at them thoughtfully. They were aged and worn. When he spoke again his voice was resigned and low. "But you know where you're going?"

"You bet I do."

"Where, if I may asked?"

Rafferty glowered at him. "Mind your own darned business." He was about to add more but changed his mind as he became aware that a group of oncomers were overtaking him and hurrying by. He watched them in silence, as did Morton.

The first four were phlegmatic Orientals trotting one behind the other. They were followed by seven tiny, brown-skinned men. Then two pale-featured women, one young and blonde, one old and silver-haired. Next, a child hand in hand with a tall, dignified man. Three whites, one black, one pygmy like a musing gnome. Lastly, four athletic youths marching abreast and in step. All passed by and moved ahead with a fixed, uncanny intentness.

STILL nursing his hands, using the same low voice, Morton said, "I was seventy-two when I died."

"Then you've got a fat lot to belly—" Rafferty clipped short his retort. Something stirred his back hairs. He wanted to sweat but couldn't. His mind fell into a whirligig of mad sensations and got spun around. His voice shot up to a hoarse, outraged shout. "What d'you mean, when you died? Don't come that stuff with me! I won't stand for it, see? I'm nobody's—"

"Try to step backward," Morton invited.

Defiantly, Rafferty tried it.

He couldn't.

"We're dead," Morton went on, inexorably. He had full control of himself, and his listener hated him for it. He pointed to those just gone ahead. "They know it. We've been slow to catch on. But we know it now." He was mild and patient as he regarded the other. "We're dead. You and me. Both of us."

"No!" Rafferty's denial was violent. "Not me!" Something inside him was burning, burning. "Not me!"

"Why not?"

"I'm plenty big. Everyone knows Bull—"

"Nobody is too big for death," said Morton.

"I'm not ready," Rafferty shouted.

"Nobody ever is ready. I wasn't, either."

Overcome, overwrought, Rafferty made a snatch at Morton. He wanted to pull him apart, tear his head off, strew him around. He wanted to go berserk, do something, anything, so long as it would work off his fear-born fury.—He was growling like an angry bear as his huge, spadelike hands reached out. The hungry hands found no satisfying grip. They groped futilely, grasping nothing, seeking a hold that was not there.

"How can you strangle the dead?" asked Morton.

The fury thwarted, Rafferty let his hands hang at his sides where they opened and closed spasmodically. His growls died away to rumbles and then to angry quietness. He said nothing for a long, long time. The fires within him sank to fragmentary embers and he felt a fearful coldness closing around. And with the coldness came back his unavowed yearning for company.

In the end, he murmured reluctantly, "This punk Frankel came straight into my office like he owned it. How he got that far unscalped is something I don't know. I'll beat out somebody's brains for that!" Completely unconscious of the folly of his threat, he went on, "This Frankel owed me plenty. He was doped sky-high and had a roscoe in his mitt. He was so far gone he couldn't talk. He spoke with his eyes—and they said he hated my guts."

"So then?" Morton encouraged.

"I know how to handle a situation like that. It's not the first fix I've been in, and I know how to handle them, see?" He was quiet for a moment, then, "I got out of my chair and walked straight at him, looking right into his glowing eyes and burning them down with mine." His voice raced up to a sudden, sharp scream. "He didn't let me have it!"

"He did," said Morton.

AT THE end of the road the strangely shining group of buildings soared until they sundered the very heavens. Mocking mere dimensional height, somehow they continued to tower into other unseeable planes. They scintillated visibly and yet shaded away into angles beyond human view, and in their base was a mighty entrance devoid of doors. The invisible guardian of the gate was named Silence.

If he could have drawn back, Rafferty would have done so. The long, long walk to the maw of inevitability had provided time for thought, deep and potent thought, and much of it had changed his mood. A voice within him had spoken all the way and he was now apprehensive and aggrieved by turns. He had found more or less plausible justifications for almost everything he could remember, every deed great or small, good or evil. All that remained was to put over his arguments if and when the necessity arose, but for once he wasn't too sure of his ability to be convincing. He needed a mouthpiece—badly.

Still animated by that peculiar, independent motivation of their own, Rafferty's legs refused to halt upon the threshold. He had a momentary struggle with them while Silence looked calmly on and saw him lose the battle. Involuntarily he went through, Morton still walking philosophically by his side. Together they strode into an immense hall in which not a soul was visible despite the fact that others had entered immediately ahead of them.

Rafferty felt the emptiness like a physical thing; it held the same awful quality of utter loneliness of which he had had a brief, unwanted taste in chaos. Fear cast itself over him like a terrible cloak. Seeking to distract himself from it, he glowered at Morton with a belligerence which had become unreal.

"Mighty sure of yourself, aren't you? Been a good little boy all your life, eh?"

"I wish I could say that." Morton sighed regretfully. "I've done my best according to my lights. No mere man can do more than that."

Seizing the point eagerly, Rafferty said, "So have I. A guy has to do certain things when he's dumped in certain places, caught up in certain circumstances. You can't help yourself when it's you or the other chump, can you? I've done many a thing I wouldn't have had to do if I'd been someone else, somewhere else. A guy has to cope with things as they come, hasn't he?"

"To a certain extent."

"Nuts on that!" snapped Rafferty.

"You've got no choice at all most times. If I'd been you and you'd been me, each of us would have acted like the other." His small, sunken eyes held an angry meditativeness. "So on that score I'm no worse than anyone else. Maybe in some ways I'm better."

Morton said nothing.

"I'm going to talk back fast and plenty if any smartie tries to railroad me," Rafferty went on. "No guy knows all the things I know, all the little items that add up to what I've got. Nobody can possibly know all that, can they?"

Morton still said nothing.

"They can't know, they can't!" Rafferty shouted. "And I'm entitled to say my piece. I've got rights. Nobody's going to frame me without a fight on his hands. Yeah, I've kicked some punks around, and I've seen off a few others, and they'd have done the same to me if I hadn't got in first. What else could I do? What else could I do?"

"At this stage it is hardly for me to say," Morton observed, evenly.

"And it isn't for anyone else to say! Not even Moses himself can know what was in my mind at any particular time, or what has played upon me ever since I was a squalling kid." Automatically he went through the defiant motion of hitching his pants and failed to notice that he was devoid of clothing although, in some way, not naked. "You stick to your halo and much good may it do you. I'm going to say things that'll mean plenty!"

Morton remained quiet.

"Moreover, I'm going to ask who made Bull Rafferty in the first place—and made me what I am!"

"Then I guess this is where you get your chance," said Morton in a whisper. He ceased walking forward as if held back by an unseen hand. His eyes were full of nervous strain.

RAFFERTY'S legs marched resolutely on while his brain bawled at them to halt. He turned his head in frightened appeal to the other to stay with him. Not alone. Not here not now.

There was no sign of Morton; he was hidden in an intervening haze. Now there was only chaos different in some subtle way from that which Raffery already had experienced; an all-encompassing blaze of shifting, sliding colors and hues in the midst of which he was alone, terribly alone. There was no way of telling whether he was walking or floating. His eyes hurt. His fear welled up afresh within him, a cold, compelling fear such as he'd never known before.

Then within the depths of his whirling mind there sounded a loud, sonorous note resembling the clamor of a mighty gong. A supernal force tore him in twain, depriving his fundamental self of some essential part he could not identify. The loss made him feel better; he was free, confident, assured. More than ever he was now the old Bull Rafferty, brutal, bellicose, sans handicapping misgivings. This was good. At the right time and in the right place he was mentally prepared to take on all comers, and that went for the judge, jury and the entire calendar of saints.

TOUGH, plenty tough he was—and more so than ever he had been. He felt peculiarly in character and out of character at one and the same time. There was no small, inward voice to bother him, to be suppressed lest it ball up the works, to be ignored, stifled or subjected to whatever treatment he deemed expedient in the circumstances. It was good to be able to face issues unhampered.

He wore a set, forbidding scowl as he waited for the battle. A multitude of elusive angular and concentric shapes swirled within the strange, vari-colored mist as if striving to pattern themselves in infinitely lower terms of a mere three dimensions. They were solidifying slowly, gaining shape and form as they molded themselves out of unimaginable planes. Rafferty saw the feet first.

This was it!

A voice that was not a voice spoke to him with what was not speech, but rather came to him as a compelling thought within his mind.

"Look upon me and know my name—for I am the beginning and the end."

Rafferty raised small eyes aflame with challenge. His heavy, pugnacious jaw was outthrust as his thick lips parted in readiness to tell the judge where he got off. But no

sound came forth, no sound, no sound at all. His gaze remained fixed, fascinated.

For what seemed to be endless eons he stared rigidly at the transformed but easily recognizable figure before his eyes; the broad, powerful torso now gentler in its lines; the heavy underlip now generous rather than cruel; the eyes, still small and deepset yet somehow wide and wise. Long familiar lineaments these; so much so that he was tremendously aware that already the last word had been spoken.

The defense rests!

A violent shiver ran through him. He broke the spell by covering his face with his hands. Turning, he tried to flee where there was no sanctuary, blindly seeking a funkhole like a scared mouse.

He was sobbing soundlessly as the dark remnant of his being craved shelter from the other.

"He is me . . . me . . . ME!"

Then his frantic dross dissolved to nothingness before the vision of that from which it had been filtered.

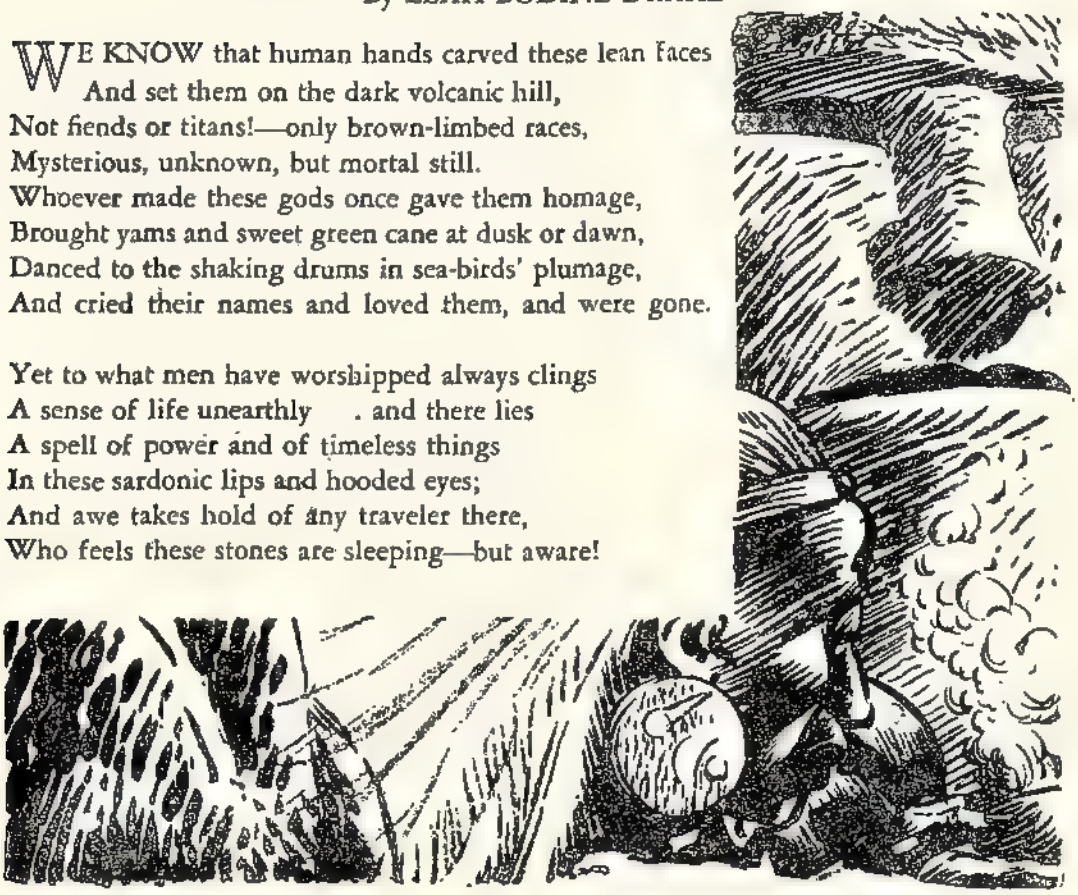
The gonglike note sounded as Morton's released feet carried him into the waiting haze.

The Heads on Easter Island

By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

WE KNOW that human hands carved these lean faces
And set them on the dark volcanic hill,
Not fiends or titans!—only brown-limbed races,
Mysterious, unknown, but mortal still.
Whoever made these gods once gave them homage,
Brought yams and sweet green cane at dusk or dawn,
Danced to the shaking drums in sea-birds' plumage,
And cried their names and loved them, and were gone.

Yet to what men have worshipped always clings
A sense of life unearthly . . . and there lies
A spell of power and of timeless things
In these sardonic lips and hooded eyes;
And awe takes hold of any traveler there,
Who feels these stones are sleeping—but aware!



Balu

BY STEPHEN GRENDON

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

WITHIN the week after his father's funeral, Walter moved in with his widowed Aunt Thea. He was now an orphan, but he did not feel any different. True, he had a sense of loss, he missed his father, but not quite everything had been taken from him. He still had Balu, though his aunt and his cousin Harold, who, at eleven, was one year his senior, eyed the great black cat with its intense green eyes

Can a cat be a person? But then, what is a person?

with disgust and manifest misgivings, and he was aware, with the instinct peculiar to childhood, that Balu would be the object of their attempts to rid the house of him.

Stout-hearted, he took possession of the room given him, and he made a place for Balu, despite his aunt's mild suggestion that perhaps "the cat" could sleep in the basement or the attic, where there were mice.

"This is a special cat," he informed her. "This is Balu. Daddy brought me Balu from Egypt. Balu is like a person, but he's very old. Balu is older than I am; he's older than this house. Daddy said Balu is older than America."

Aunt Thea showed her disapproval, but said nothing.

His trunks followed him—one filled with clothing, the other with books and mementoes of life with his father, his mother having died almost beyond the limits of his memory. He was fair, with curly hair, sturdily built, in contrast to his thin, gangling cousin Harold. He was self-contained, for he had lived a long time in his father's apartment, while his father had been away on his trips of exploration.

"I hope you will like it here, Walter," said Aunt Thea when he came down to dinner the first night. "We'll try to help you forget your loss."

"Thank you, Aunt Thea," he said gravely.

But he was not deceived. Harold resented him. He did not know how much Aunt Thea was getting for taking care of him, but he suspected she was being well paid. It would be difficult with Harold not liking him, and it would be difficult about Balu. But he meant to survive.

Before he had been in his new home two days, Harold was at him about "that cat." Harold was particularly annoying because of his superior air, as if mere birthdays gave him an intangible edge over Walter.

"My mother says there's nothing different about your cat," he said, perched on Walter's bed.

"There is so," retorted Walter.

"There is not."

"My Daddy got him in Egypt. He ought to know. He got him from some kind of priest. A priest of Thoth, he said. Balu is a very special person."

"A cat can't be a person."

"Balu is."

Balu, curled on top of Walter's bureau, took no notice of the conversation. He made a great, black cushion there, reflected in the mirror. His ears were tufts of black that stood straight up. His whiskers were long and handsome. His eyes were as green as jade. He half sat, half lay, looking coldly into distance far beyond the room's confining walls.

"Besides," continued Harold, sneering, "my mother says Uncle William was queer."

"He was not!"

"He was, too!"

"My Daddy was a great explorer. What was your Daddy?"

Harold could not answer that. He was routed.

Balu raised up, humped his back, stretched himself with infinite grace. He descended, leaped lightly over to Walter, and rubbed against him, muttering a throaty purr. Very plainly, he approved of Walter. He walked carefully, haughtily, around Harold.

"Balu doesn't like you," said Walter soberly.

"I don't like Balu, either."

HAROLD'S second attack came within the week. He came complaining that the servants were frightened of Balu. There were but two, both black. It was true that the blacks were frightened of Balu; they had always been. Walter remembered very well an old Negro who had worked for a while for his father. He had shunned the cat; more than that, he had walked carefully all around it. In this house, it was worse because the blacks were women. Women always carried on so. He had heard them.

He had heard them say, "Lawdy, dat cat am a witch-cat, hope to die!" He had heard them say, "Dat Balu got de sperit in him way down deep. He old. He old es de world."

"Balu scares old Lou," said Harold. "And Melissa, too."

"Blacks are always scared of Balu," said Walter scornfully. "You know why?"

"No. Why?"

"Because they know. They know about Balu. Daddy said the blacks could feel

things we can't feel. They feel how old Balu is. They feel Balu is special."

"You're talking foolish."

"No, I'm not."

"You are so. You're talking lies, that's what they are."

Walter was outraged. "I never lie. I don't have to. Balu is . .

"Balu is an ugly black cat," interrupted Harold, "who ought to be poisoned or something."

"You get out of here—saying things like that!" Walter clenched his fists.

"Who's going to make me?"

"I am."

Balu broke in with a curious sound of anger. His tail was thick, thick as an upraised club.

"If that cat scratches me—I'll kick it," said Harold.

"Balu doesn't scratch."

"Is he any good besides just sitting there?"

"Balu catches mice and rats."

"You feed him plenty from our table," said Harold accusingly.

"I guess that's paid for."

"Anyway, if you don't get rid of that cat, we might lose Lou and Melissa. And if we do, my mother is going to be plenty mad."

"Balu goes where I go," said Walter firmly. "I stay where Balu is."

A muted purr came from Balu, though the cat did not lift its head.

AUNT THEA had noticed the vindictiveness of Harold, and the rift between the boys. She regretted it and fluttered, but she hoped that it would soon be over and done. There would be a period of adjustment; that could not be helped. But, being foolish, she could not help unwittingly abetting Harold by talking carelessly of William Bayle—how fruitless his explorations had been, how queer a man he was, how little attention he had paid to Walter, and so on.

Harold remembered.

It was difficult for Walter. It made him realize how much he missed his father. It brought home to him for the first time that he did not have his father's protection, nor did he have that wonderful freedom to do as he liked, when only the governess had kept a beneficent eye on him, seldom interfering, only guiding gently and keeping him from harm. How he wished sometimes that his father were still alive, and everything were once again as it had been!

One day he caught Harold in his room tormenting Balu. Balu was in a corner, and Harold was throwing books at him—Walter's books. Walter leaped on Harold, beating him with his fists. Harold, trying to escape, fell to the bed.

"You dirty beast!" cried Walter. "If I ever catch you doing that again, I'll—I'll kill you."

Harold recovered his feet, and backed against the wall. "I didn't hurt him," he said sullenly.

Walter went over to Balu, stroking the cat, petting him, talking to him. Over his shoulder he said, "Get out of my room."

"This is *our* house—not yours," said Harold defiantly.

Walter turned on his haunches and glared at him. "Get out!"

Harold sidled toward the door and vanished.

Walter looked to his cat once more. "Did he hurt you, Balu?"

Balu seemed to understand. Balu came to him, rubbing against him, purring.

He felt Balu all over. The cat flinched at no touch; so he was not hurt. He began to pick up the books Harold had thrown. "I'll kill him," he muttered balefully.

Balu's tail switched from side to side. He nuzzled one of Walter's fingers. He licked the back of Walter's hand.

Thereafter, he would not confine Balu to his room. Balu went with him everywhere. He disdained to notice the cowering blacks, though it was extraordinary the way they flattened to the wall when Balu passed, the way they muttered strange gibberish under their breath. In a confiding moment, Harold told him that the black delivery boys from downtown stores no longer stopped to talk, but left their baskets and were off; they had heard about Balu. They believed Balu had strange powers.

Aunt Thea was upset and angry, but there was William's money to consider. While she was not indigent, it meant a good deal to her. Somehow, for all his extravagance and carelessness, William Bayle had man-

aged to gather a lot of money, and she meant to have all she could before Walter reached his majority.

HAROLD found ways to trouble Walter. If they played tennis in the court behind the house, and Balu was there, Harold managed at least once each time to bat the ball at the cat. Walter knew he did it on purpose, but he could not prove it; invariably, he stopped playing immediately, went sulking to the house, morose with anger he could not vent upon his cousin.

If they sat inside playing cards or any other household game, Balu beside them, Harold never missed an opportunity to step on Balu's tail. Curiously, the cat never screamed, but only drew away and licked its tail, and Walter's cries of rage were ended by his aunt's defense of Harold. "Anyone could see it was just an accident, Walter," she said, time after time. But Walter knew it was no accident.

When he ignored Harold, his cousin came to his room. Always at him about Balu. . . .

"That cat scared Melissa so today she busted a dozen eggs. . . . "

"That cat hasn't caught a mouse since she was here. Two whole months, almost three. . "

"That cat's been sharpening her claws on our good furniture. . . ."

"Mother says your dad wasn't quite all there. . ."

But in the end, Harold returned to methods more direct.

Thinking Walter at the dentist's one afternoon, he invaded Walter's room with an ingenious weapon—a toasting fork extended and tied to a broom-handle. Carefully securing doors and windows, so that the cat could not escape to the hall or the adjoining storeroom, where it might find shelter among old boxes and trunks, Harold got after Balu.

He had inflicted two gashing wounds when Walter came.

When Walter had finished with Harold, Harold had several long scratches and gashes from his own improvised weapon, and in his vindictiveness, Harold blamed the wounds upon Balu, so that Aunt Thea talked to Walter and insisted that Balu must be "done away with." Walter stood his ground, but told no word of Harold's perfidy.

In the night he was awakened by Balu's insistence.

The cat lay on his belly on the bed, his green eyes shining in the dark.

"What is it, Balu?"

Walter put on the light and watched the cat jump up to the bookcase. On the second shelf a book jutted forth. Balu clawed downward, and the book fell to the floor. Balu came after, walking back and forth across the opened book.

Walter came down to his knees and gazed at it. It was his father's Egyptian book with his penciled notes. *Book of the Dead.* He gazed at Balu, walking impatiently back and forth.

Clearly Balu expected something of him. He began to page through the book, and at once Balu came to sit opposite him, intent upon his paging.

Abruptly, Balu thrust forth a paw, laid it upon the page, and looked at him. The cat's green eyes seemed to swim before him, to enlarge. They were pools, ponds, oceans, and within them moved a strange procession of all manner of beings—ancient men in Egyptian garb, wearing masking headdresses, the priests of Bast, winged creatures and four-footed ones, cats, and men, men and cats through ages past. The illusion passed.

Walter bent to read his father's notes.

What he read was stranger still. He read it carefully, over and over, memorizing it. He tried to understand. What it said was something about transforming one person into another. The words were there, the directions were given.

Balu watched him intently.

Walter put the book back in its place and pondered. He went to bed and dreamed —dreamed of great gulfs of time and space, of towering pyramids and ancient men, of things beyond his knowledge, things lost in far time.

Three days later he invited Harold to his room to play a game.

"What kind of game is it?" asked Harold.

"It's a new game," said Walter. "It's a transforming game."

"I never played it before."

"No, I guess you never did."

HAROLD trooped along to the room and looked at the changes Walter had made. "Gee, you moved things around a little!"

"I had to."

"What're those circles for?"

"They're part of the game."

"You'll catch it—chalking up the floor."

"Now you stand here, Harold, in the middle of his circle, and Balu has to sit in the middle of the other one—like this."

"Does that cat know how to play this game?"

"Yes, he does. Balu's very smart, Harold. Balu's smarter than I am or you are. He's smarter than anybody is."

"Oh, cut that out. That's not part of this game."

"I guess in a way it is."

"Well, what next?"

"Now I have to kneel in front of you and say some words, and then something happens."

"Aw, stuff!"

"Really it does. Harold, please, just stay and play it once."

"Well, all right."

Walter hoped that he had understood his father's notes. Balu sat attentively in one of the chalked circles, and Harold stood in the other. Harold looked curiously at all the little signs and hieroglyphs

"What're those things?"

"They're part of the game."

"What are they?"

"I don't know, really, Harold. It's just part of the game. You're supposed to do it that way."

"I'm going to be twelve next week. I'm getting too old to play kids' games."

"Now, listen."

He read. He intoned words.

For a moment nothing happened. Then abruptly the cat leaped into the air, tail thick, every hair taut and extended. He began to spit and claw the air; his tongue stuck from between his teeth, and the sounds that rose from his throat were like bestial, half articulate human words. But no words came.

Shaken, Walter looked at Harold.

But Harold was somehow different. There was a light in his eyes that had never been there before. His eyes were—like Balu's eyes. As Walter looked, Harold sank to his knees, then to his belly. Stretched out flat, he leaned forward and licked Walter's hand.

WHEN, after a long period of silence, while Walter was confining the cat that had once been Balu, and accustoming himself to Harold in his transformation, Aunt Thea could no longer ignore the absence of the boys and called to find out where they were, Walter answered, somewhat tremulously.

"Up here, Aunt Thea."

"Up where, Walter?"

"In my room."

"Is Harold there, too?"

"Yes, Aunt Thea."

"What on earth is he doing?"

Walter swallowed and said that Harold was reading. He could not very well tell Aunt Thea what Harold was doing. At the moment Harold was in the storeroom catching mice. Walter hoped earnestly that the early hangovers from the previous incarnation would soon be lost, or else Aunt Thea might ask him questions he could not answer. Yet he felt that he could count on Balu.

When Aunt Thea wrote her next monthly letter to the executor of William Bayle's estate, an estimable Southern gentleman who saw to it that she was paid for Walter's keep, she could not resist a paragraph about the changed circumstances of the household.

"You will be delighted to learn that the boys, who were once so quarrelsome, get along beautifully together now. It is so inspiring to witness such a transformation. Harold, who had not been kind to Walter, I must admit, now seems actually to fawn upon him—not disgustingly, of course; but certainly he is extremely fond of his cousin. And Walter, now that we have had to dispose of his cat, (which apparently went into fits one day in his room and could not be brought out of them), has the somewhat quaint habit of calling Harold *Balu*, after his cat. Oddly enough the servants, who once adored Harold, now seem to be unable to tolerate his presence. But, I suppose, one must expect blacks to be a little queer. . . ."

The Bonan of Baladewa

BY MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

A GREAT many fine and decent American soldiers were stationed in Java during the Late Unpleasantness with Japan—but Major Caleb A. Knox was not one of them.

If there is anything worse than a stuffed shirt, it is a stuffed uniform; and in this category Major Knox of the 133rd Anti-Aircraft probably led the field. He was a small prissy middle-aged man of the spit-

There are matters even beyond the ken of our most self-assured military governors!

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

and-polish school—so touchy about his lack of impressive height that he continually tried to offset it with a nasty and unreasonable temper. His subordinates despised him, but they jumped when he gave an order because they knew to what lengths he would go to avenge some petty grievance. Too many of them knew: good intelligent—and usually tall—young soldiers with unfaded patches on their uniform sleeves where hard-won chevrons had been arbitrarily ripped off.

I have this story from just such a soldier, a corporal in the Major's outfit, so perhaps we should take it with a grain of salt.

But I saw that *bonan*—it is in a museum now, in Washington, on display in the music room. I saw Caleb Knox, too—in a private sanitarium, screaming and hanging onto his narrow bed as though it were a bucking horse. "War neurosis" is what the doctors called it. Last war it was "shell shock", though often enough the victim has never been near the battle zone, as in the case of the Major.

Furthermore, in his wilder raving, he mentions nothing whatever about bombs or shellfire. It is a *volcano*, of all things, that his neurotic obsession goads him to believe is about to erupt and bury him under tons of red-hot lava—although the nearest volcano is a dead one, and in Mexico, hundreds of miles away. A curious case, the psychiatrists agree; and the only treatments they can offer him consist of hydrotherapy, insulin shock, and confinement to a padded cell for the rest of his life.

Certainly they would hoot at the idea that the smashing of a certain beautifully-carved Javanese *bonan*, in a museum four states away, might release Caleb Knox from the thing he thinks he hears, day and night. Day and night . . . though the war has been over for four years, and Pava is on the other side of the world; though old Baladewa is probably dead, and young Peter Garrity is back home in the Bronx, married now, and busy polishing up his *Javanese Symphony* which you may have heard broadcast last month from Carnegie Hall . . .

But in 1943 Major Knox was stationed in a little village near Surabaya, throwing his rank at every unfortunate young G.I. who happened to cross his path.

ONE of these was Pfc. Peter Garrity, a red-headed freckle-faced young six-footer who did more for the morale of his fellow-servicemen thereabouts than probably anyone besides the *ronggengs*, curvaceous native dancers who could be hired to perform at parties organized to relieve the local military monotony. Pfc. Garrity could play anything: the guitar, Hawaiian or western-style; the violin, concert or square-dance; the clarinet and saxophone; the trumpet—he was official bugler until he got himself busted for naughtily "swinging" reveille one morning after a hard night's bivouac in the rain. He had music in the marrow of his bones and rhythm sticking out of his rather prominent ears. It was contagious; you found yourself whistling or drumming on something whenever he was around, as though silent music were being broadcast from his mind to yours. . And I have reason, after hearing this story, to believe that such a phenomenon is quite possible. Have you ever held the underground aerial of a radio in your hand, to make the sound-waves come in more clearly? Have you ever thought that *telepathy* may only be some yet-to-be-understood phase of radio? Or that *clairvoyance* may be no more than a television broadcast from one mind to another?

Peter Garrity, however, knew nothing about extra-sensory perception and cared less; he only knew and cared about music.

Major Knox, on the other hand, frowned on music as an integral part of being a soldier—possibly because he was tone-deaf. Someone had laughed at him as a boy, no doubt, for not being able to carry a tune; and now he was hitting back, by proxy at the men in his division. Whenever he heard a group of soldiers harmonizing together in the strains of *White Christmas* or *Lili Marlene*, or having a hurried jam-session before drill call, he always managed to break it up for a very sound reason, militarily speaking. It was too late, or too early, or too something; quiet was imperative, or such-and-such a duty must be performed on the double. Music, he was wont to repeat, softened a fighting-man.

Usually these musical groups that he chose to squelch centered around Pete Garrity—Pete and his jiving guitar, Pete

and his lowdown clarinet, Pete and his dancing fiddle, or ukulele, or somebody's borrowed concertina. He was the biggest soldier in that particular camp, built like a football player and six-feet-five in height, with big awkward-looking hands that seemed incapable even of holding a frail musical instrument without crushing it. The fact that those hands could take apart and reassemble an anti-aircraft gun in nothing flat only annoyed the Major more violent!. He would like to have been able to prove that Garrity neglected his M.S.&T. for his musical hobby, but the young man was one of the best men in his outfit and everybody knew it, including the Colonel.

More infuriating than ever to the small officer was the fact that Garrity never seemed to resent being kept a private first-class when he had earned a boost in rank months ago. Always grinning rather shyly, he performed the menial tasks heaped upon him because of his size, and he snapped out a salute, whenever the little Major passed, with a speed and precision in which he could find no flaw. He never went A.W.O.L.; his quarters were spotless; he was never "out of uniform" when strolling about the village *kampong,* shopping for souvenirs to send the home-folks.

Yet, miraculously—almost as if there were two of him—Pfc. Garrity seemed eternally to be lounging around with an idle group of men in camp, playing one or another of the numerous musical instruments to be found scattered around any army post. The ease with which those big brutal-looking hands coaxed beautiful sound from strings or wood constantly delighted his buddies and disgusted Major Knox. There was some insufferably sissy, he felt, about a man's being musically inclined, and in a big hulking creature like Garrity, it was incongruous. Nature, Knox thought bitterly, should have endowed *him* with that tall splendid body, if all Pete Garrity wanted to be was a . . . a hepcat, revolting Americanism! How the *ronggengs* ogled the young private at parties! How the women chased after him, even the Colonel's daughter! But all Garrity ever did with his manly charms and his spare time was waste them on a . . . a gutbucket, if that was what they called those musical clambakes between C.Q. and taps! There were times when the Major told himself gratingly that war was hell and he simply could not bear it.

There were rumors, though, that convinced him that he could. Rumors that the Colonel was about to be transferred, leaving him in full command of the small camp and also in full possession of the abandoned coffee plantation that had been quarters for the Colonel's family. With the house and garden, Knox would inherit two excellent native servants—Baladewa, a wizened old Javanese with a *kris*-scar across one blinded eye, and Parmu, his exquisite young granddaughter who looked like something out of a Kipling poem.

For months, whenever the Colonel's wife was not in evidence, looking down her nose at all forms of "fraternizing with the natives", Major Knox had been secretly making a play for Parmu. He dreamed about her, and woke up in a cold sweat of desire.

Maddeningly she was always around when he reported to his superior—swaying in from the veranda with a jug of palm-wine or a platter of sweet cakes, bare feet and bare shoulders the color of wild honey, dressed only in a thin batik sarong, with a red hibiscus in her blue-black hair, worn over the right ear to show that her heart had not as yet been given to any man.

When he waylaid her one day, skulking behind a dwarf quince so the Colonel's wife could not see, she stood before him without a trace of fear and none of coquettry, lowering her slant-eyes only because it it very bad luck to let a stranger peer into the windows of one's soul. She spoke a few words of English, or rather of American slang, and gave these as answers that were often startingly inappropriate.

"Sst! Come here!" the Major hissed at her one evening, peeking over his shoulder to make sure the Colonel had gone back into the house. "You . . . velly pretty. Savee?" he floundered, his fingers twitching to caress her plump arm. "Facee . . . like flower. You savee?"

"Oyay, sowat, you leel sonnuvagun," the girl parroted politely, and offered him a betel nut—so obviously unaware of the meaning of the words some practical-joking soldiers had taught her that anyone but

Caleb Knox would have laughed uproariously.

But dark blood welled into his face. He drew himself up to his full height, which still topped the girl's five feet by only two inches. His hand jerked up, an almost involuntary gesture of fury, and slapped little Parmu hard in the face. She gasped and recoiled but did not cry out, more startled than intimidated. She gave the officer one look of utter scorn, then whirled and melted rather than fled among the low coffee trees.

AT THAT moment someone coughed politely behind the Major. He spun about, angry red face turning white with fear that it was the Colonel. But standing there, towering over him apologetically, was only Pfc. Peter Garrity and Baladewa, the old Javanese houseman.

Major Knox blinked at them, sputtering, and decided to bluster it out.

"Well?" he snarled. "What do you want, Garrity? What are you doing off the post, and . . . and in the company of a native? Fraternizing is against regulations; you know that! Damned insolent natives! Give 'em an inch, they'll take a mile! That that girl just now, she was . . . making improper advances to me! Had to put her in her place . . . "

"Yessir," the young G.I. said without inflection. But a gadfly lit on his cheek just then, and his mouth twitched.

Major Knox glared. "Wipe that smile off your face?" he exploded. "Well, what do you want? Speak up!"

"Major, sir, we . . . that is, I came to see the Colonel. But he's already left for Surabaya, so I thought if you gave permission, sir . . . " Garrity floundered, then plouged on doggedly: "A bunch of the guys . . . er . . . men up at camp. . . . That is, well, sir, this old fellow used to play the *bonan* in the rayol gamelan. At court, sir. For the Sultan of Mataram. . . . " He hesitated, glancing at the ancient Javanese, who salaamed several times with a toothless grin.

"Yes? Yes? What's that got to do with me?" Knox snapped.

"Sir, we'd like to organize a . . . a gamelan of our own, out at camp," Garrity plunged. "Just for the fun of it. Some of the guys . . . er . . . men have run across native instruments in shops around Surabaya. Spinelli has a bamboo xylophone. Catson has a drum made of water buffalo hide. Daley bought a zither some place, and a coupla others have cymbals and gongs. And I made a two-string viol, myself, sir—out of ebony and ivory. This old fellow, name's Baladewa, sir, he has a *bonan* and promises to teach us some real Javanese music. You see, sir," Garrity's face brightened shyly, "when we're mustered out, a bunch of us plan to open a Javanese nightclub, somewhere back home in the States . . . ." His voice had warmed with enthusiasm, but it broke off at the Major's hostile expression.

"A nightclub, eh? Indeed!" Knox sneered, hands locked behind his back, rising and rocking pompously on the balls of his feet—a mannerism his men often mimicked in secret. "*After* you're mustered out, Private? It appears to me," he snapped, "that you're making civilian plans right now, while we're still involved in the . . . the serious business of war! Royal gamelan!" His pale eyes flicked over the old musician and dismissed him. "American soldiers, allowing themselves to be tutored by . . . by an ignorant Javanese peasant! Where's your dignity, man? Are you going native? By god, if this is what too little activity is doing to my men at camp," he smiled acidly, "I'll remedy that right away! Starting tomorrow—I think we'll renew basic training. You men are getting soft!"

"Yessir," Garrity said without inflection. But this time the gadfly lit on his nose, and he made an involuntary grimace that struck his superior officer as a covert sneer.

"Report to the guardhouse!" Knox roared. "Garrity, I'm well aware of your . . . your insurbordination behind my back. You've done nothing but stir up discontent among the men. Break down their fighting spirit, their . . . their pride of outfit that I've worked very hard to build up. You and your . . . musical teas! This is war, man! What did you enlist for, to be a . . . a fiddle-player? That won't kill any Japs!"

"Yessir! . . . Nossir!" Garrity, who was red-headed and born in Tennessee, began to breathe faster, lips compressed, brown eyes glinting. "But, sir . . . " The words seemed wrung from him as though he could no

more have suppressed them than he could stiffle the music in his heart. "Sir, maybe if . . . if we'd understood the Oriental mind, there needn't have been any war. It isn't too late to start now—and their music is as good a place to begin as any, sir! Japanese music isn't much different from Javanese. But, gosh, sir, it's sure different from ours! Ever hear any? At first, all it sounds like is a lot of crazy noise. No beat, no tune, and it's likely to break off anywhere! But . but after you kinda get the hang of it . ." The young soldier's voice had warmed again with enthusiasm, which chilled abruptly at sight of a sly glint in the Major's pale-blue eyes.

"Well-ll!" Knox drawled. "A Jap sympathizer, we have here!" His snide tone of triumph hardened. "Report at once to the guardhouse, Garrity! I've given that order once. Obey it! And when I drop the word around among the men," his smile thinned, "that you feel the nice musical Japanese are more to be admired than . than chastised for what they did to Pearl Harbor, I rather think your popularity and . and subversive influence will be a thing of the past!"

"Why, I . I didn't say that, sir!" the young man gasped. "I only said . ."

"Same thing, same thing!" Major Knox gave a gesture of dismissal and stalked away from the miserable G.I., who had just had his first bitter taste of how the wrong people can twist the right words completely out of shape.

He languished in the guardhouse for ten days—"Insubordination" was the vague charge. It did strike him as queer that none of his buddies sneaked up to his barred window at night to thrust candy bars and cigarettes through to him. But he thought little of it until he was released—and the five men who had dreamed up the gamelan-idea with him unaccountably turned their backs and drifted away at his approach.

IT TOOK Garrity some time to realize what the Major's hints had done to him among fellow-soldiers he had counted as his friends, for, during the bewildering time of war, blind hate is a simpler thing to live by than tolerance and understanding. Overnight, in the eyes of every G.I. at the small camp—many of whom had come to Java with the horrors of Saipan and Tarawa fresh in their minds—Pfc. Garrity had become a traitor, a Jap-lover; at best a long-haired radical. Quite suddenly the most popular young soldier in Major Knox's outfit found himself alone, cut off from his comrades by a barrier too subtle to fight against and yet too strong to break down.

His one staunch friend was old Baladewa. The aged Javanese seemed to shadow him everywhere, popping up at odd times and places, grinning his toothless one-eyed grin, with a present of ripe mangoes, a pipe of palm-wine, or a bright *baju* made by his granddaughter who worked with the other women in the batik shed—a *baju* and *jarit*, dyed with saffron, though yellow was a color forbidden to anyone not of royal lineage. Several times, even, the old man had offered him Parmu herself—puzzled but not offended when Pete, blushing furiously, whipped out a snapshot of his girl back home in New York.

"Sings with a band, the one I used to lead," he tried to explain. "A slick chick, Grandpop—but she loves me! She wouldn't pull anything raw like that with me, so I couldn't with her. Not that your granddaughter isn't . . isn't . . . er . . . ." He grinned at the shy native girl, peeking out at him always whenever the old man found him. "Boy! Is she—!" He gave up and summarized his opinion in a long two-note whistle.

Parmu giggled, nodded, and transferred her red hibiscus to the left ear—though Pete never learned what the gesture meant.

Out of sheer loneliness, though, he strolled with her in the village often. At night, when the men drew away from him at the recreation hall, he came to dropping in at old Baladewa's hut. He would squat for hours on the dirt floor of the bamboo house outside the lime-washed walls of the *kampong*, listening to the old musician play on his *bonan*—an old one of iron and bamboo which he had had as a boy and which neither want nor wealth had ever induced him to sell. Now and then Garrity would bring his two-string viol and accompany the old man, drinking too much palm-wine, then staggering doggedly back to the camp to another day of bewildering ostracism.

Old Baladewa's music and the quiet company of little Parmu kept him from going crazy with loneliness—but not for long.

A month later the Colonel was transferred, and Major Knox took over his command, his quarters, old Baladewa's services as houseman . . . and Parmu.

The aged Javanese had little time thereafter for trailing his young American friend around the *kampong*. Knox was a fanatic about neatness, and he worked the old man unmercifully—cursing him when the floors of the plantation house were not freshly scrubbed or his boots and Sam Brown were not polished just so. And from the first day he began his conquest of little Parmu—sometimes coaxing her, sometimes threatening, occasionally bringing her a cheap trinket from Surabaya, a nose-jewel or a silver anklet.

When he discovered that she could dance beautifully, that, like her mother who had been a court dancer, she was capable of executing the difficult *Serimpi* and the sacred *Bedoyo,* the goddess-dance performed only before royalty, he made her dance for him almost every night. Old Baladewa was drafted to play for her, beating out the weird music on his ancient *bonan* with the long cloth-padded reed hammers. The Major ordered him away after the first few exhibitions, though, preferring the records on his portable gramaphone to the off-beat minor tunes of Java that seemed to have no beginning and no end. But it puffed up his ego that these two artistes should be performing, for him alone, entertainment that only sultans could command heretofore. Well—*he* was a kind of sultan now, wasn't he? Certainly he, as resident officer of a conquering army, had the power of life or death over everyone in this out-of-the-world post where—Knox ran his tongue over thin wet lips—where a man could enjoy all the delights of the flesh with very little output, by being only a bit discreet.

No; the Major was not a good man, nor a good soldier. Too many whole nations are judged by the measure of such a man, taken by foreigners to be a composite of all their countrymen. Everyone in the village, as well as the men in his division, began to hate and fear him; for he found a number of ways to make money off others' misfortune or bad judgment. Petty fines, black-marketing, bribery, these were among his lesser talents. He staffed his plantation-quarters with natives who were afraid not to work for him for whatever he chose to pay—but that was not enough to feed his monstrous conceit. He had to have a white man, a tall white man, preferably a soldier, to order about and bully. This unenviable position fell to Pfc. Pete Garrity, whom the men had already excluded from any ordinary place in their ranks.

When Garrity apparently requested to move out to the plantation as "Little Stinker's" batman, he lost whatever chance he may have had to make a come-back among his buddies. They finally decided that he was not to be blamed for his crazy views; that he was, quite obviously, a crackpot who ought to be psychoed back home with a medical discharge. They began to treat him less like an enemy than a harmless lunatic—rubbing the salt of contempt into the open wound of their distrust. They ceased to avoid him but now merely ignored him; and they would not have believed anything he swore on a stack of Bibles.

SO, WHEN Garrity tried excitedly one morning to tell a certain young corporal in his outfit that incredible story about old Baladewa's *bonan,* his erstwhile friend simply spat very close to Garrity's foot and walked away, chuckling.

The tall young G.I. followed him, plucking at his sleeve.

"On the level, Jerry!" he insisted. "Every night the old guy barricades himself inside his hut. Won't let me in, or even his granddaughter. He sits in there all alone—I've peeked in at him with a flashlight. In the pitchdark, he sits. Playing on that *bonan.* But it's not the one he had before! This one is all carved and gilded and set with gems. They look real! It's like a kind of fancy couch without springs or mattress. Across the bed of it, on two stretched cords, are hung these ten little pots. Only these aren't iron. They're silver; no kidding! Kind of like a Swiss bell-ringer's outfit I saw in a vaudeville act once. They're graduated in size, see, and he beats on 'em with these two little padded hammers' . . ."

"You fascinate me Scheherazade!" the

corporal yawned, and struck Garrity's hand from his sleeve, brushing off imaginary dirt. "Look, Pete," he spoke with the patient good-humor of one addressing a troublesome child, "Scram! Get lost, will ya? I got a heavy date to shoot some nine-ball. . . ."

Garrity flushed at the tone, but tried once more. "Jerry, I tell you, there's something . . spooky about this! Old Baladewa keeps playing that thing, and then . then all at once you begin to hear *other instruments.* Zithers, and wooden-bar and metal-bar xylophones. And there's a . . a two-string viol like the one I made; you can hear it whining out the air, and you can hear drums, too. But . . but under the music, there's a . . a kind of funny vibration. You feel it in your teeth and your fingertips first, and then it begins to shake you all over, like that earthquake tremor we had last year. . ."

"Ah, you're fulla hop!" the corporal jeered, edging away again. "Go sleep it off, kid. Geez," he advised kindly, "you oughtn't to hang around those natives and drink so much wine. There's plenty beer in the PX. . ."

"Yeah—if I drink alone!" Garrity's smile twisted wrily, his naive brown eyes troubled. "Now," he added almost as if to himself, "even old Baladewa doesn't want me around. He's up to something funny! Last night I passed by while he was playing, and Parmu was beating on the door, sobbing and crying: *'Pantang!* Not the volcano-song! *Pantang!'* That Javanese word means *forbidden.* . . The old man hates the Major for what he's doing to Parmu!" his mouth hardened, fists knotting. "That little essbee! He's a sadist! I I hear her lots of times, whimpering and screaming in his room at night! He ought to get what's coming to him, sure. But . but maybe not what old Baladewa is cooking up. . . !"

The corporal paused briefly with a flicker of curiosity about the rest of Garrity's wild tale. There just might be an inkling of truth behind it; something that would make a tidbit of barracks gossip, at least.

"*What's* he cooking up?" he prodded, grinning. "Trying to poison the Major? Or planning to declare an *amok,* the way these natives do, and kill everybody in his path? Nah! He's too old for that. . . . So the Major's been making laterals at his granddaughter, eh? The cute one with the flower over her ear? I thought she was *your* girl, Petey! Looks like Little Stinker has pulled rank on you again!"

"Well, he'll never get Parmu!" Pfc. Garrity gave him a queer wild look and shook his head, fists clenched. "No! She'll never be his to . . to . . . . Just wait!" he muttered. "Just wait and see!"

The corporal laughed and thought no more about the incident—until three days later. Then he remembered, and reported the conversation to his lieutenant as nearly as he could recall it, out of a sense of duty.

For, on that night, a half-drunk soldier, wandering into camp late after a party in the village, had stumbled over the body of a native girl in a field outside the walls of the *kampong,* halfway between the post and the Major's quarters. She was not immediately recognizable as little Parmu, for her pretty slant-eyes were blacked and swollen, her nose-ornament torn from her pierced nostril, and her mouth cut and bleeding as from the blows of a fist. Around her throat was twisted a sisal cord which someone finally recognized as the frame-string from a Javanese *bonan.*

WHEN TWO MPs went to search for the girl's grandfather, he had disappeared. But inside his bamboo hut, Pfc. Peter Garrity was discovered, reeking of palm-wine but unconscious from a blow on the head. His knuckles were slightly bruised, and there were fingernail scratches on his cheek and blood on his khaki shirt. And old Baladewa's *bonan*—the plain one with the iron pots, not the ornate one of Garrity's wild story—lay smashed in pieces all around him, almost beyond repair, with one of the sisal cords missing.

In the opinion of the courtmartial, it was an open-and-shut case. Consider the evidence, added to the testimony of the young corporal about Garrity's "threat"—that a certain imaginary rival of high rank would "never get" his paramour. Just as obvious, though, was the fact that Garrity was psychopathic on the subject of Oriental music — as witness the smashed *bonan.* So, in-

stead of to prison, he was sent to the nearest veterans' hospital. And there the young man remained for the duration of the war —a model patient, however, who often cheered up his fellow-inmates by playing requests on whatever musical instrument was given him. Later he was transferred to a hospital in the States. But he was not discharged until another mental case was brought to the same overseas hospital from the same little Javanese village. That other patient was Major Caleb Knox; symptoms: a ringing in the ears, violent palsy, paranoia, fixed delusions.

It seems that the Major had continued to rule his village-dynasty with a grasping hand, long after the tragedy about the native girl. The aged Javanese, Baladewa, never came back, and it was thought by many that Pfc. Garrity had murdered him also in his mad frenzy, and disposed of the body. True; some native discovered a row of bare footprints leading up the steep side of the local volcano that loomed like a brooding giant over the little village. It was a dead volcano—but on the night of little Parmu's murder, and again on the day of Peter Garrity's trial and conviction for that murder, the ground around that locality shook with violent tremors and a red glow hung in the sky above the crater of the sleeping giant. Old Baladewa did not show his face again, suffice it to say—and Pete was branded as a psychopathic killer.

That is, he was branded as such until shortly after the night Major Knox ran screaming from his plantation-quarters, begging the sergeant-of-the-guard to "get that damned *bonan* out of my room and make it stop playing." Numbers of his men had noticed the Major's peculiar change of late —growing more marked every day. He was nervous as a mouse-deer, he had indigestion, and he slept almost not at all. He had developed a habit of sticking his forefinger in his ear and shaking it, as though to stop some imaginary sound therein. He shouted at everyone on a shrill hysterical note. Later he began to walk unsteadily and hold onto his chair, with visible symptoms of vertigo, screeching that "the damned volcano" was "at it again"— though no tremors had been recorded on the seismograph in Surabay's weather bureau for months.

ON THE night he ran shrieking from his bed, the sergeant found no trace of a *bonan* in his room, and little else of note besides four empty whiskey bottles which he chose to accept as an explanation. But when the Major repeated his performance six nights in a row, to the extent of stopping up his ears and beating his head against a tree trunk in the plantation yard, the non-com discreetly reported it to the camp doctor. He, in turn, reported it to headquarters. Shortly thereafter Major Knox was relieved of his command and hospitalized for "nervous treatment"—to stop that bell-like ringing in his ears, of which he complained, and that wracking delusion of earthquake tremors.

At the hospital, though, he got worse instead of better. Over and over he pled with someone—some imaginary creature of his delusion whom he addressed as "Baladewa", begging him to "stop calling the volcano, stop calling it with that hellish *bonan*, I didn't mean to kill her, I didn't, I didn't, it was the music, that damned monotonous music and the way she was dancing to it for *him!* The *tandak* dance of gratitude, for knocking me down when I was dragging her. Damned insolent private! Striking his superior officer to protect a brown-skinned. . I'll show her! I'll teach her respect, and him too! And you, old one-eyed scarecrow, you'll never play this thing again! Run! Run, you old fool! You won't dare come back and tell anybody what I . I . . . *The volcano! He's calling it again! Telling it to . to . . find me! I hear it! I . . . . I feel . . .*"

This last is recorded as the Major's repeated babbling under the influence of sodium pentothal, the "truth" drug. Further details were wired to the hospital in the States to which Pete Garrity was transferred. His name was cleared, of course—though he stubbornly sticks to his account of what he saw through the crack of old Baladewa's hut that night: an ornate jeweled *bonan* the old man played, in company with the unseen ghosts of other members of the royal gamelan, all dead save only himself. I choose to believe it was his same *bonan*, glorified only by the old man's genius.

That *bonan*, smashed by Knox after the murder, was later gathered up by the young

corporal who told me this story. He repaired it, shipped it home, and sold it to a museum in Washington—for a tidy sum which set him up in a small plumbing business in his home-town. He is a nice practical young man, though of little imagination. He merely recounts this story; he does not for a moment believe it. The part about the spirit-gamelan, I mean, and the ghost of Baladewa driving the Major mad with his weird volcano-song. . True, he says, the skeleton of an elderly man was found in the crater of a certain extinct volcano near Surabaya. But native Javanese are always throwing themselves down volcanoes—a favorite form of suicide on that exotic island. It may or may not have been the desperate old musician, trading his life for a last bit of black magic to avenge his granddaughter and free his young American friend.

It is the corporal who called my attention to the broadcast of Peter Garrity's *Javanese Symphony* from Carnegie last month. I listened, but only out of curiosity—for Javanese music sets my teeth on edge. It is without any definite beat, and its tuneless whine and *tinka-tinka-tok* has a deadly monotony.

It gets into my head and goes round and round—as it must have done to Major Knox, brooding over his terrible secret of crime and injustice. Yes; it could drive an Occidental mad, the memory of it—especially if he imagined he heard it again, played on a smashed *bonan* by some one from Beyond. . . . Give me one of the Dorsey brothers or Bing Crosby any time!

But maybe it is only that I do not understand "the long music"; do not *try* to understand it. Not the way young Peter Garrity tried, in his simple desire to span the great chasm between East and West with the strongest bridge of them all: man's emotional response to sounds. It is a powerful thing—music, Garrity always knew that.

But perhaps only old Baladewa, with his ancient Oriental wisdom, knew just how very powerful it can be.

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JULIUS UNGER ○ 6401 — 24th AVENUE ○ BROOKLYN 4, NEW YORK

Our Fair City

PETE Perkins turned into the All-Nite parking lot and called out, "Hie Pappy!"

The old parking lot attendant looked up and answered, "Be with you in a moment, Pete." He was tearing a Sunday comic sheet in narrow strips. A little whirlwind waltzed near him, picking up pieces of old newspaper and bits of dirt and flinging them in the faces of passing pedestrians. The old man held out to it a long streamer of the brightly colored funny-paper. "Here, Kitten," he coaxed. "Come, Kitten—"

The whirlwind hesitated, then drew itself up until it was quite tall, jumped two parked cars, and landed *sur le point* near him.

It seemed to sniff at the offering.

"Take it, Kitten," the old man called softly and let the gay streamer slip from his fingers. The whirlwind whipped it up and wound it around its middle. He tore off another and yet another; the whirlwind wound them in a corkscrew through the loose mass of dirty paper and trash that constituted its visible body. Renewed by cold gusts that poured down the canyon of tall buildings, it swirled faster and ever taller, while it lifted the colored paper ribbons in a fantastic upswept hair-do. The old man turned, smiling. "Kitten does like new clothes."

"Take it easy, Pappy, or you'll have me believing in it."

"Eh? You don't have to believe in Kitten—you can *see* her."

"Yeah, sure—but you act as if she—I mean 'it'—could understand what you say."

"You still don't think so?" His voice was gently tolerant.

"Now, Pappy!"

"Hmm . lend me your hat." Pappy reached up and took it. "Here, Kitten," he called. "Come back, Kitten!" The whirlwind was playing around over their heads, several stories high. It dipped down.

"Hey! Where you going with that chapeau?" demanded Perkins.

"Just a moment—Here, Kitten!" The whirlwind sat down suddenly, spilling its load. The old man handed it the hat. The whirlwind snatched it and started it up a fast, long spiral.

"Hey!" yelped Perkins. "What do you think you're doing? That's not funny—that hat cost me six bucks only three years ago.

"Don't worry," the old man soothed. "Kitten will bring it back."

"She will, huh? More likely she'll dump it in the river."

"Oh, No! Kitten never drops anything she doesn't want to drop. Watch." The old man looked up to where the hat was dancing near the penthouse of the hotel across the street. "Kitten! Oh, Kitten!" Bring it back."

The whirlwind hesitated, the hat fell a couple of stories. It swooped, caught it, and juggled it reluctantly. "Bring it *here*, Kitten."

THE hat commenced a downward spiral, finishing in a long curving swoop. It hit Perkins full in the face. "She was trying to put it on your head," the attendant explained. "Usually she's more accurate."

"She is, eh?" Perkins picked up his hat and stood looking at the whirlwind, mouth open.

"Convinced?" asked the old man.

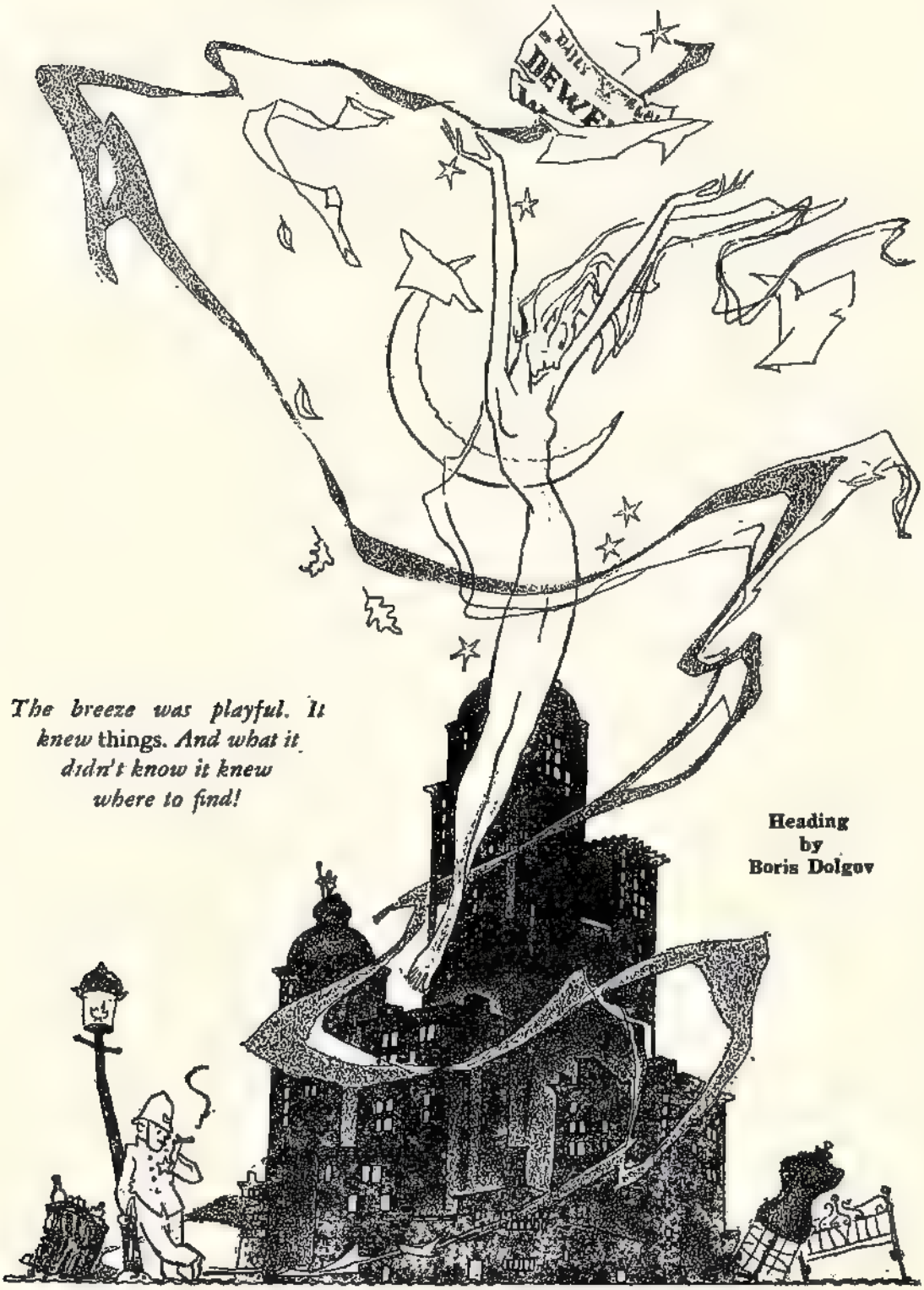
" 'Convinced?' Oh, sho' sho.' " He looked back at his hat, then again at the whirlwind. "Pappy, this calls for a drink."

They went inside the lot's little shelter shack; Pappy found glasses; Perkins produced a pint, nearly full, and poured two generous slugs. He tossed his down, poured another, and sat down. "The first was in honor of Kitten," he announced. "This one is to fortify me for the Mayor's banquet."

Pappy cluck-clucked sympathetically. "You have to cover that?"

"Have to write a column about *something*, Pappy. 'Last night Hizzoner the Mayor, surrounded by a glittering galaxy of highbinders, grifters, sycophants, and ballot thieves, was the recipient of a testi-

By Robert Heinlein



The breeze was playful. It knew things. *And what it didn't know it knew where to find!*

Heading by Boris Dolgov

monial dinner celebrating—' Got to write something, Pappy; the cash customers expect it. Why don't I brace up like a man and go on relief?"

"Today's column was good, Pete," the old man comforted him. He picked up a copy of the *Daily Forum;* Perkins took it from him and ran his eye down his own column.

"OUR FAIR CITY, by Peter Perkins," he read, and below that "What, No Horse Cars? It is the tradition of our civic paradise that what was good enough for the founding fathers is good enough for us. We stumble over the very chuckhole in which greatuncle Tozier broke his leg in '09. It is good to know that the bath water, running out, is not gone forever, but will return through the kitchen faucet, thicker and disguised with chlorine, but the same. (Memo—Hizzoner uses bottled spring water. Must look into this.)

"But I must report a dismaying change. Someone has done away with the horsecars!

"You may not believe this. Our public conveyances run so seldom and slowly that you may not have noticed it; nevertheless I swear that I saw one wobbling down Grand Avenue with no horses of any sort. It seemed to be propelled by some new-fangled electrical device.

"Even in the atomic age some changes are too much. I urge all citizens—" Perkins gave a snort of disgust. "It's tackling a pillbox with a beanshooter, Pappy. This town is corrupt; it'll stay corrupt. Why should I beat out my brains on such piffle? Hand me the bottle."

"Don't be discouraged, Pete. The tyrant fears the laugh more than the assassin's bullet."

"Where'd you pick that up? Okeh, so I'm not funny. I've tried laughing them out of office and it hasn't worked. My efforts are as pointless as the activities of your friend the whirling dervish."

The windows rattled under a gusty impact. "Don't talk that way about Kitten," the old man cautioned. "She's sensitive."

"I apologize." He stood up and bowed toward the door. "Kitten, I apologize. Your activities are *more* useful than mine." He turned to his host. "Let's go out and talk to her, Pappy. I'd rather do that than go to the Mayor's banquet, if I had my druthers."

They went outside, Perkins bearing with him the remains of the colored comic sheet. He began tearing off streamers. "Here, Kitty! Here, Kitty! Soup's on!"

The whirlwind bent down and accepted the strips as fast as he tore them. "She's still got the ones you gave her."

"Certainly," agreed Pappy. "Kitten is a pack rat. When she likes something she'll keep it indefinitely."

"Doesn't she ever get tired? There must be some calm days."

"It's never really calm here. It's the arrangement of the buildings and the way Third Street leads up from the river. But I think she hides her pet playthings on tops of buildings."

THE newspaperman peered into the swirling trash. "I'll bet she's got newspapers from months back. Say, Pappy, I see a column in this, one about our trash collection service and how we don't clean our streets. I'll dig up some papers a couple of years old and claim that they have been blowing around town since publication."

"Why fake it?" answered Pappy, "Let's see what Kitten has." He whistled softly. "Come, baby—let Pappy see your playthings." The whirlwind bulged out; its contents moved less rapidly. The attendant plucked a piece of old newspaper from it in passing. "Here's one three months old."

"We'll have to do better than that."

"I'll try again." He reached out and snatched another. "Last June."

"That's better."

A car honked for service and the old man hurried away. When he returned Perkins was still watching the hovering column. "Any luck?" asked Pappy.

"She won't let me have them. Snatches them away."

"Naughty Kitten," the old man said. "Pete is a friend of ours. You be nice to him." The whirlwind fidgeted uncertainly.

"It's all right," said Perkins. "She didn't know. But look, Pappy—see that piece up there? A front page."

"You want it?"

"Yes. Look closely—the headline reads 'DEWEY' something. You don't suppose

she's been hording it since the '44 campaign?"

"Could be. Kitten has been around here as long as I can remember. And she does hoard things. Wait a second." He called out softly. Shortly the paper was in his hands. "Now we'll see."

Perkins peered at it. "I'll be a short-term Senator! Can you top that, Pappy?"

The headline read: DEWEY CAPTURES MANILA; the date was "1898".

TWENTY minutes later they were still considering it over the last of Perkins' bottle. The newspaperman stared at the yellowed, filthy sheet. "Don't tell me this has been blowing around town for the last half century."

"Why not?"

" 'Why not?' Well, I'll concede that the streets haven't been cleaned in that time, but this paper wouldn't last. Sun and rain and so forth."

"Kitten is very careful of her toys. She probably put it under cover during bad weather."

"For the love of Mike, Pappy, you don't really believe—But you do. Frankly, I don't care where she got it; the official theory is going to be that this particular piece of paper has been kicking around our dirty streets, unnoticed and uncollected, for the past fifty years. Boy, am I going to have fun!" He rolled the fragment carefully and started to put it in his pocket.

"Say, don't do that!" his host protested.

"Why not? I'm going to take it down and get a pic of it."

"You mustn't! It belongs to Kitten—I just borrowed it."

"Huh? Are you nuts?"

"She'll be upset if she doesn't get it back. Please, Pete—she'll let you look at it any time you want to."

The old man was so earnest that Perkins was stopped. "Suppose we never see it again? My story hangs on it."

"It's no good to *you*—*she* has to keep it, to make your story stand up. Don't worry—I'll tell her that she mustn't lose it under any circumstances."

"Well—okay." They stepped outside and Pappy talked earnestly to Kitten, then gave her the 1898 fragment. She promptly tucked it into the top of her column. Perkins said goodbye to Pappy, and started to leave the lot. He paused and turned around, looking a little befuddled. "Say, Pappy—"

"Yes, Pete?"

"You don't really think that whirlwind is alive, do you?"

"Why not?"

'Why not?' Why not, the man says?"

"Well," said Pappy reasonably, "how do you know *you* are alive?"

"But . . . why, because I—well, now, if you put it—" He stopped. "I don't know. You got me, pal."

Pappy smiled. "You see?"

"Uh, I guess so. G'night, Pappy. G'night, Kitten." He tipped his hat to the whirlwind. The column bowed.

THE managing editor sent for Perkins. "Look, Pete," he said, chucking a sheaf of grey copy paper at him, "whimsy is all right, but I'd like to see some copy that wasn't dashed off in a gin mill."

Perkins looked over the pages shoved at him. "OUR FAIR CITY" by Peter Perkins. Whistle Up The Wind. Walking our streets always is a piquant, even adventurous, experience. We pick our way through the assorted trash, bits of old garbage, cigarette butts, and other less appetizing items that stud our sidewalks while our faces are assaulted by more buoyant souvenirs, the confetti of last Hallowe'en, shreds of dead leaves, and other items too weather-beaten to be identified. However, I had always assumed that a constant turn-over in the riches of our streets caused them to renew themselves at least every seven years—" The column then told of the whirlwind that contained the fifty-year-old newspaper and challenged any other city in the country to match it.

" 'Smatter with it?" demanded Perkins.

"Beating the drum about the filth in the streets is fine, Pete, but give it a factual approach."

Perkins leaned over the desk. "Boss, this *is* factual."

"Huh? Don't be silly, Pete."

"Silly, he says. Look—" Perkins gave him a circumstantial account of Kitten and the 1898 newspaper.

"Pete, you must have been drinking."

"Only Java and tomato juice. Cross my heart and hope to die."

"How about yesterday? I'll bet the whirlwind came right up to the bar with you."

"I was cold, stone—" Perkins stopped himself and stood on his dignity. "That's my story. Print it, or fire me."

"Don't be like that, Pete. I don't want your job; I just want a column with some meat. Dig up some facts on man-hours and costs for street cleaning, compared with other cities."

"Who'd read that junk? Come down the street with me. I'll *show* you the facts. Wait a moment—I'll pick up a photographer."

A few minutes later Perkins was introducing the managing editor and Clarence V. Weems to Pappy. Clarence unlimbered his camera. "Take a pic of him?"

"Not yet, Clarence. Pappy, can you get Kitten to give us back the museum piece?"

"Why, sure." The old man looked up and whistled. "Oh, Kitten! Come to Pappy." Above their heads a tiny gust took shape, picked up bits of paper and stray leaves, and settled on the lot. Perkins peered into it.

"She hasn't got it," he said in aggrieved tones.

"She'll get it." Pappy stepped forward until the whirlwind enfolded him. They could see his lips move, but the words did not reach them.

"Now?" said Clarence.

"Not yet." The whirlwind bounded up and leapt over an adjoining building. The managing editor opened his month, closed it again.

Kitten was soon back. She had dropped everything else and had just one piece of paper—*the* paper. "Now!" said Perkins. "Can you get a shot of that paper, Clarence—while it's in the air?"

"Natch," said Clarence, and raised his Speed Graphic. "Back a little, and hold it," he ordered, speaking to the whirlwind.

Kitten hesitated and seemed about to skitter away. "Bring it around slow and easy, Kitten," Pappy supplemented, "and turn it over—no, no! Not that way—the other edge up." The paper flattened out and sailed slowly past them, the headline showing.

"Did you get it?" Perkins demanded.

"Natch," said Clarence. "Is that all?" he asked the editor.

"Natc— I mean, 'that's all'."

"Okay," said Clarence, picked up his case, and left.

The editor sighed. "Gentlemen," he said, "let's have a drink."

FOUR drinks later Perkins and his boss were still arguing. Pappy had left. "Be reasonable, Boss," Pete was saying, "you can't print an item about a live whirlwind. They'd laugh you out of town."

Managing Editor Gaines straightened himself.

"It's the policy of the *Forum* to print all the news, and print it straight. This is news—we print it." He relaxed. "Hey! Waiter! More of the same—and not so much soda."

"But it's scientifically impossible."

"You saw it, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—"

Gaines stopped him. "We'll ask the Smithsonian Institution to investigate it."

"They'll laugh at you," Perkins insisted. "Ever hear of mass hypnotism?"

"Huh? No, that's no explanation—Clarence saw it, too."

"What does that prove?"

"Obvious—to be hypnotized you have to have a mind. *Ipso facto.*"

"You mean *Ipse dixit.*"

"Quit hiccuping, Perkins, you shouldn't drink in the daytime. Now start over and say it slowly."

"How do you know Clarence doesn't have a mind?"

"Prove it."

"Well, he's alive—he must have some sort of a mind, then."

"That's just what I was saying. The whirlwind is alive; therefore it has a mind. Perkins, if those longbeards from the Smithsonian are going to persist in their unscientific attitude, I for one will not stand for it. The *Forum* will not stand for it. You will not stand for it."

"Won't I?"

"Not for one minute. I want you to know the *Forum* is behind you, Pete. You go back to the parking lot and get an interview with that whirlwind."

"But I've got one. You wouldn't let me print it."

"Who wouldn't let you print it? I'll fire him! Come on, Pete. We're going to blow this town sky high. Stop the run. Hold the front page. Get busy!" He put on Pete's hat and strode rapidly into the men's room.

PETE settled himself at his desk with a container of coffee, a can of tomato juice, and the Midnight Final (late afternoon) edition. Under a 4-col. cut of Kitten's toy was his column, boxed and moved to the front page. 18-point boldface ordered SEE EDITORIAL PAGE 12. On page 12 another black line enjoined him to SEE "OUR FAIR CITY" PAGE ONE. He ignored this and read: MR. MAYOR—RESIGN! ! ! !

Pete read it and chuckled. "An ill wind —" "—symbolic of the spiritual filth lurking in the dark corners of the city hall." "—will grow to cyclonic proportions and sweep a corrupt and shameless administration from office." The editorial pointed out that the contract for street cleaning and trash removal was held by the Mayor's brother-in-law, and then suggested that the whirlwind could give better service cheaper.

The telephone jingled. He picked it up and said, "Okay—you started it."

"Pete—is that you?" Pappy's voice demanded. "They got me down at the station house."

"What for?"

"They claim Kitten is a public nuisance."

"I'll be right over." He stopped by the Art Department, snagged Clarence, and left. Pappy was seated in the station lieutenant's office, looking stubborn. Perkins shoved his way in. "What's he here for?" he demanded, jerking a thumb at Pappy.

The lieutenant looked sour. "What are you butting in for, Perkins? You're not his lawyer."

"Now?" said Clarence.

"Not yet, Clarence. For news, Dumbrosky,—I work for a newspaper, remember? I repeat—what's he in for?"

"Obstructing an officer in the performance of his duty."

"That right, Pappy?"

The old man looked disgusted. "This character—" He indicated one of the policemen "—comes up to my lot and tries to snatch the Manila-Bay paper away from Kitten. I tell her to keep it up out of his way. Then he waves his stick at me and orders me to take it away from her. I tell him what he can do with his stick." He shrugged. "So here we are."

"I get it," Perkins told him, and turned to Dumbrosky. "You got a call from the city hall, didn't you? So you sent Dugan down to do the dirty work. What I don't get is why you sent Dugan. I hear he's so dumb you don't even let him collect the pay-off on his own beat."

"That's a lie!" put in Dugan. "I do so—"

"Shut up, Dugan!" his boss thundered. "Now, see here, Perkins—you clear out. There ain't no story here."

" 'No story'?" Perkins said softly. "The police force tries to arrest a whirlwind and you say there's no story?"

"Now?" said Clarence.

"Nobody tried to arrest no whirlwind! Now scram."

"Then how come you're charging Pappy with obstructing an officer? What was Dugan doing—flying a kite?"

"He's not charged with obstructing an officer."

"He's not, eh? Just what have you booked him for?"

"He's not booked. We're holding him for questioning."

"So? Not booked, no warrant, no crime alleged, just pick up a citizen and roust him around, Gestapo style." Perkins turned to Pappy. "You're not under arrest. My advice is to get up and walk out that door."

Pappy started to get up. "Hey!" Lieutenant Dumbrosky bounded out of his chair, grabbed Pappy by the shoulder and pushed him down. "I'm giving the orders around here. You stay—"

"Now!" yelled Perkins. Clarence's flashbulb froze them. Them Dumbrosky started up again.

"Who let him in here? Dugan—get that camera."

"Nyannh!" said Clarence and held it away from the cop. They started doing a little Maypole dance, with Clarence as the Maypole.

"Hold it!" yelled Perkins. "Go ahead and

grab the camera, Dugan—I'm just aching to write the story. 'Police Lieutenant Destroys Evidence of Police Brutality.'"

"What do you want I should do, Lieutenant?" pleaded Dugan.

Dumbrosky looked disgusted. "Siddown and close your face. Don't use that picture, Perkins—I'm warning you."

"Of what? Going to make me dance with Dugan? Come on, Pappy. Come on, Clarence." They left.

"OUR FAIR CITY" read the next day. "City Hall Starts Clean Up. While the city street cleaners were enjoying their usual siesta, Lieutenant Dumbrosky, acting on orders of Hizzoner's office, raided our Third Avenue whirlwind. It went sour, as Patrolman Dugan could not entice the whirlwind into the paddy wagon. Dauntless Dugan was undeterred; he took a citizen standing nearby, one James Metcalfe, parking lot attendant, into custody as an accomplice of the whirlwind. An accomplice in what, Dugan didn't say—everybody knows that an accomplice is something pretty awful. Lieutenant Dumbrosky questioned the accomplice. See cut. Lieutenant Dumbrosky weights 215 pounds, without his shoes. The accomplice weighs 119.

"Moral: Don't get underfoot when the police department is playing games with the wind.

"P. S. As we go to press, the whirlwind is still holding the 1898 museum piece. Stop by Third and Main and take a look. Better hurry—Dumbrosky is expected to make an arrest momentarily."

Pete's column continued needling the administration the following day: "Those Missing Files. It is annoying to know that any document needed by the Grand Jury is sure to be mislaid before it can be introduced in evidence. We suggest that Kitten, our Third Avenue Whirlwind, be hired by the city as file clerk extraordinary and entrusted with any item which is likely to be needed later. She could take the special civil exam used to reward the faithful—the one nobody ever flunks.

"Indeed, why limit Kitten to a lowly clerical job? She is persistent—and she hangs on to what she gets. No one will argue that she is less qualified than some city officials we have had.

"Let's run Kitten for Mayor! She's an ideal candidate— she has the common touch, she doesn't mind hurly-burly, she runs around in circles, she knows how to throw dirt, and the opposition can't pin anything on her.

"As to the sort of Mayor she would make, there is an old story—Aesop told it—about King Log and King Stork. We're fed up with King Stork; King Log would be welcome relief.

"Memo to Hizzoner—what *did* become of those Grand Avenue paving bids?

"P. S. Kitten still has the 1898 newspaper on exhibit. Stop by and see it before our police department figures out some way to intimidate a whirlwind."

PETE snagged Clarence and drifted down to the parking lot. The lot was fenced now; a man at a gate handed them two tickets but waved away their money. Inside he found a large circle chained off for Kitten and Pappy inside it. They pushed their way through the crowd to the old man. "Looks like you're coining money, Pappy."

"Should be, but I'm not. They tried to close me up this morning, Pete. Wanted me to pay the $50-a-day circus-and-carnival fee and post a bond besides. So I quit charging for the tickets—but I'm keeping track of them. I'll sue 'em, by gee."

"You won't collect, not in this town. Never mind, we'll make 'em squirm till they let up."

"That's not all. They tried to capture Kitten this morning."

"Huh? Who? How?"

"The cops. They showed up with one of those blower machines used to ventilate manholes, rigged to run backwards and take a suction. The idea was to suck Kitten down into it, or anyhow to grab what she was carrying."

Pete whistled. "You should have called me."

"Wasn't necessary. I warned Kitten and she stashed the Spanish-War paper someplace, then came back. She loved it. She went through that machine about six times, like a merry-go-round. She'd zip through and come out more full of pep than ever. Last time through she took Sergeant Yancel's cap with her and it clogged the machine and

ruined his cap. They got disgusted and left."

Pete chortled. "You still should have called me. Clarence should have gotten a picture of that."

"Got it," said Clarence.

"Huh? I didn't know you were here this morning, Clarence."

"You didn't ast me."

Pete looked at him. "Clarence, darling—the idea of a news picture is to print it, not to hide it in the art department."

"On your desk," said Clarence.

"Oh. Well, let's move on to a less confusing subject. Pappy, I'd like to put up a big sign here."

"Why not? What do you want to say?"

"Kitten-for-Mayor—Whirlwind Campaign Headquarters. Stick a 24-sheet across the corner of the lot, where they can see it both ways. It fits in with—oh, oh! Company, girls!" He jerked his head toward the entrance.

SERGEANT YANCEL was back. "All right, all right!" he was saying. "Move on! Clear out of here." He and three cohorts were urging the spectators out of the lot. Pete went to him.

"What goes on, Yancel?"

Yancel looked around. "Oh, it's you, huh? Well, you, too—we got to clear this place out. Emergency."

Pete looked back over his shoulder. "Better get Kitten out of the way, Pappy!" he called out. *"Now,* Clarence."

"Got it," said Clarence.

"Okay," Pete answered. "Now, Yancel, you might tell me what it is we just took a picture of, so we can title it properly."

"Smart guy. You and your stooge had better scram if you don't want your heads blown off. We're setting up a bazooka."

"You're setting up a *what?"* Pete looked toward the squad car, unbelievingly. Sure enough, two of the cops were unloading a bazooka. "Keep shooting, kid," he said to Clarence.

"Natch," said Clarence.

"And quit popping your bubble gum. Now, look, Yancel—I'm just a newsboy. What in the world is the idea?"

"Stick around and find out, wise guy." Yancel turned away. "Okay there! Start doing it—commence firing!"

One of the cops looked up. "At what, Sergeant?"

"I thought you used to be a marine—at the whirlwind, of course."

Pappy leaned over Pete's shoulder. "What are they doing?"

"I'm beginning to get a glimmering. Pappy, keep Kitten out of range—I think they mean to put a rocket shell through her gizzard. It might bust up her dynamic stability or something."

"Kitten's safe. I told her to hide. But this is crazy, Pete. They must be absolute, complete and teetotal nuts."

"Any law says a cop has to be sane to be on the force?"

"What whirlwind, Sergeant?" the bazooka man was asking. Yancel started to tell him, forcefully, then deflated when he realized that no whirlwind was available.

"You wait," he told him, and turned to Pappy. "You!" he yelled. "You chased away that whirlwind. Get it back here."

Pete took out his notebook. "This is interesting, Yancel. Is it your professional opinion that a whirlwind can be ordered around like a trained dog? Is that the official position of the police department?"

"I—No comment! You button up, or I'll run you in."

"By all means. But you have that Buck-Rogers cannon pointed so that, after the shell passes through the whirlwind, if any, it should end up just about at the city hall. Is this a plot to assassinate Hizzoner?"

Yacel looked around suddenly, then let his gaze travel an imaginary trajectory.

"Hey, you lugs!" he shouted. "Point that thing the other way. You want to knock off the Mayor?"

"That's better," Pete told the Sergeant. "Now they have it trained on the First National Bank. I can't wait."

Yancel looked over the situation again. "Point it where it won't hurt nobody," he ordered. "Do I have to do all your thinking?"

"But, Sergeant—"

"Well?"

"You *point* it. We'll fire it."

Pete watched them. "Clarence," he sighed, "you stick around and get a pic of them loading it back into the car. That will be in about five minutes. Pappy and I will

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be in the Happy Hour Bar-Grill. Get a nice picture, with Yancel's features."

"Natch," said Clarence.

The next installment of OUR FAIR CITY featured three cuts and was headed "Police Declare War on Whirlwind." Pete took a copy and set out for the parking lot, intending to show it to Pappy.

Pappy wasn't there. Nor was Kitten. He looked around the neighborhood, poking his nose in lunchrooms and bars. No luck.

HE HEADED back toward the *Forum* building, telling himself that Pappy might be shopping, or at a movie. He returned to his desk, made a couple of false starts on a column for the morrow, crumpled them up and went to the art department. "Hey! Clarence!" Have you been down to the parking lot today?"

"Nah."

"Pappy's missing."

"So what?"

"Well, come along. We got to find him."

"Why?" But he came, lugging his camera.

The lot was still deserted, no Pappy, no Kitten—not even a stray breeze. Pete turned away. "Come on, Clarence—say, what are you shooting now?"

Clarence had his camera turned up toward the sky. "Not shooting," said Clarence. "Light is no good."

"What was it?"

"Whirlwind."

"Huh? Kitten?"

"Maybe."

"Here, Kitten—come Kitten." The whirlwind came back near him, spun faster, and picked up a piece of cardboard it had dropped. It whipped it around, then let him have it in the face.

"That's not funny, Kitten," Pete complained. "Where's Pappy?"

The whirlwind sidled back toward him. He saw it reach again for the cardboard. "No, you don't!" he yelped and reached for it, too.

The whirlwind beat him to it. It carried it up some hundred feet and sailed it back. The card caught him edgewise on the bridge of the nose. "Kitten!" Pete yelled. "Quit the horsing around."

It was a printed notice, about six by

eight inches. Evidently it had been tacked up; there were small tears at all four corners. It read: "THE RITZ-CLASSIC" and under that, "Room 2013, Single Occupancy $6.00, Double Occupancy $8.00." There followed a printed list of the house rules.

Pete stared at it and frowned. Suddenly he chucked it back at the whirlwind. Kitten immediately tossed it back in his face.

"Come on, Clarence," he said briskly. "We're going to the Ritz-Classic—room 2013."

"Natch," said Clarence.

The Ritz-Classic was a colossal fleabag, favored by the bookie-and-madame set, three blocks away. Pete avoided the desk by using the basement entrance. The elevator boy looked at Clarence's camera and said, "No, you don't, Doc. No divorce cases in this hotel."

"Relax," Pete told him. "That's not a real camera. We peddle marijuana—that's the hay mow."

"Whyn't you say so? You hadn't ought to carry it in a camera. You make people nervous. What floor?"

"Twenty-one."

The elevator operator took them up non-stop, ignoring other calls. "That'll be two bucks. Special service."

"What do you pay for the concession?" inquired Pete.

"You gotta nerve to beef—with your racket."

They went back down a floor by stair and looked up room 2013. Pete tried the knob cautiously; the door was locked. He knocked on it—no answer. He pressed an ear to it and thought he could hear movement inside. He stepped back, frowning.

Clarence said, "I just remember something," and trotted away. He returned quickly, with a red fire ax. "Now?" he asked Pete.

"A lovely thought, Clarence! Not yet." Pete pounded and yelled, "Pappy! Oh, Pappy!"

A large woman in a pink coolie coat opened the door behind them. "How do you expect a party to sleep?" she demanded.

Pete said, "Quiet, madame! We're on the air." He listened. This time there were sounds of struggling and then, "Pete! Pe—"

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"*Now!*" said Pete. Clarence started swinging.

THE lock gave up on the third swing. Pete poured in, with Clarence after him. He collided with someone coming out and sat down abruptly. When he got up he saw Pappy on a bed. The old man was busily trying to get rid of a towel tied around his mouth.

Pete snatched it away. "Get 'em!" yelled Pappy.

"Soon as I get you untied."

"I ain't tied. They took my pants. Boy, I though you'd never come!"

"Took Kitten a while to make me understand."

"I got 'em," announced Clarence. "Both of 'em."

"Where?" demanded Pete.

"Here," said Clarence proudly, and patted his camera.

Pete restrained his answer and ran to the door. "They went that-away," said the large woman, pointing. He took out, skiddded around the corner and saw an elevator door just closing.

Pete stopped, bewildered by the crowd just outside the hotel. He was looking uncertainly around when Pappy grabbed him. "There!" That touring car!" The car Pappy pointed out was even then swinging out from the curb just beyond the rank of cabs in front of the hotel; with a deep growl it picked up speed, and headed away. Pete yanked open the door of the nearest cab.

"Follow that car!" he yelled. They all piled in.

"Why?" asked the hackie.

Clarence lifted the fire ax. "Now?" he asked.

The driver ducked. "Forget it," he said. "It was just a yak." He let in his clutch.

The hack driver's skill helped them in the downtown streets, but the driver of the touring car swung right on Third and headed for the river. They streamed across it, fifty yards apart, with traffic snarled behind them, and then were on the no-speed-limit freeway. The cabbie turned his head. "Is the camera truck keeping up?"

"What camera truck?"

"Ain't this a movie?"

"Good grief, no! That car is filled with kidnappers. Faster!"

"A snatch? I don't want no part of it." He braked suddenly.

Pete took the ax and prodded the driver. "You catch 'em!"

The hack speeded up again but the driver protested, "Not in this wreck. They got more power than me."

Pappy grabbed Pete's arm. "There's Kitten!"

"Where? Oh, never mind that now!"

"Slow down!" yelled Pappy. "Kitten, oh, Kitten—over here!"

The whirlwind swooped down and kept pace with them. Pappy called to it. "Here, baby! Go get that car! Up ahead—*get it!*"

Kitten seemed confused, uncertain. Pappy repeated it and she took off—like a whirlwind. She dipped and gathered a load of paper and trash as she flew.

They saw her dip and strike the car ahead, throwing paper in the face of the driver. The car wobbled. She struck again. The car veered, climbed the curb, richocheted against the crash rail, and fetched up against a lamp post.

FIVE minutets later Pete, having left Kitten, Clarence, and the fire ax to hold the fort over two hoodlums suffering from abrasion, multiple contusions and shock, was feeding a nickle into a pay phone at the nearest filling station. He dialled long distance. "Gimme the FBI's kidnap number," he demanded. "You know—the Washington, D.C., snatch number."

"My goodness," said the operator, "do you mind if I listen in?"

"Get me that number!"

"Right away!"

Presently a voice answered, "Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"Lemme talk to Hoover! Huh? Okay, okay—I'll talk to you. Listen this is a snatch case. I've got 'em on ice, for the moment, but unless you get one of your boys from your local office here pronto there won't be any snatch case—not if the city cops get here first. What?" Pete quieted down and explained who he was, where he was, and the more believable aspects of the events that had led up to the present situa-

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tion. The government man cut in on him as he was urging speed and more speed and assured him that the local office was already being notified.

Pete got back to the wreck just as Lieutenant Dumbrosky climbed out of a squad car. Pete hurried up. "Don't do it, Dumbrosky," he yelled.

The big cop hesitated. "Don't do what?"

"Don't do anything. The FBI are on their way now—and you're already implicated. Don't make it any worse."

Pete pointed to the two gunsels; Clarence was sitting on one and resting the spike of the ax against the back of the other. "These birds have already sung. This town is about to fall apart. If you hurry, you might be able to get a plane for Mexico."

Dumbrosky looked at him. "Wise guy," he said doubtfully.

"Ask them. They confessed."

One of the hoods raised his head. "We was threatened," he announced. "Take 'em in, lieutenant. They assaulted us."

"Go ahead," Pete said cheerfully. "Take us all in—together. Then you won't be able to lose that pair before the FBI can question them. Maybe you can cop a plea."

"Now?" asked Clarence.

Dumbrosky swung around. "Put that ax down!"

"Do as he says, Clarence. Get your camera ready to get a picture as the G-men arrive."

"You didn't send for no G-men.

"Look behind you!"

A dark blue sedan slid quietly to a stop and four lean, brisk men got out. The first of them said. "Is there someone here named Peter Perkins?"

"Me," said Pete. "Do you mind if I kiss you?"

IT WAS after dark but the parking lot was crowded and noisy. A stand for the new Mayor and distinguished visitors had been erected on one side, opposite it was a bandstand; across the front was a large illuminated sign: HOME OF KITTEN—HONORARY CITIZEN OF OUR FAIR CITY.

In the fenced-off circle in the middle Kitten herself bounced and spun and swayed and danced. Pete stood on one side of the circle with Pappy opposite him; at four-

foot intervals around it children were posted. "All set?" called out Pete.

"All set," answered Pappy. Together, Pete, Pappy and the kids started throwing serpentine into the ring. Kitten swooped, gathered the ribbons up and wrapped them around herself.

"Confetti!" yelled Pete. Each of the kids dumped a sackful toward the whirlwind—little of it reached the ground.

"Balloons!" yelled Pete. "Lights!" Each of the children started blowing up toy balloons; each had a dozen different colors. As fast as they were inflated they fed them to Kitten. Floodlights and searchlights came on; Kitten was transformed into a fountain of boiling, bubbling color, several stories high.

"Now?" said Clarence.

"Now!"

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946, of WEIRD TALES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y. for October 1, 1948.

State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared William J. Delaney, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President-Treasurer of WEIRD TALES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily, weekly, semiweekly or triweekly newspaper, the circulation etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and Jul 2, 1946 (Section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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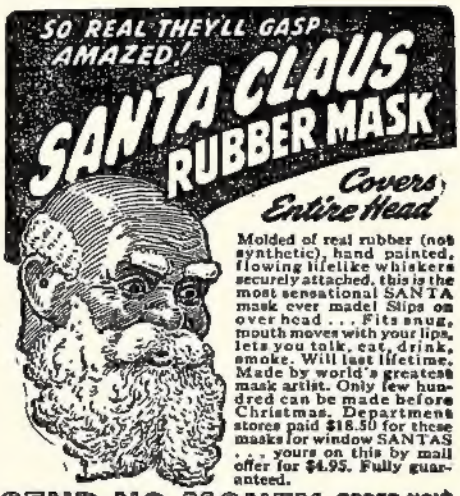

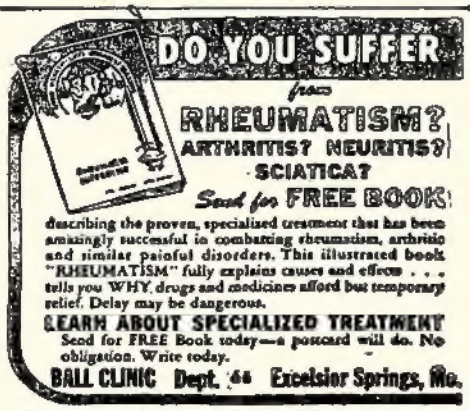

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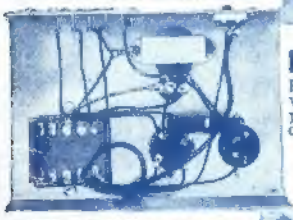

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CHECK SIZES WANTED 44☐, 46☐, 48☐, 50☐
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MY TOTAL PURCHASE AMOUNTS TO: $.....C. O. D.